

BBC

*Collector's Edition*

75<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY  
★

# D-DAY

## AND THE BATTLE FOR NORMANDY



★ Gruelling training regimes ★ 24 hours that changed the war

★ Amazing soldiers' stories ★ The bloody battle for France

★ D-Day's enduring legacy

FROM THE MAKERS OF BBC HiSTORY MAGAZINE



# THE ALLIED LANDINGS 6 JUNE 1944





*Collector's Edition*

# D-DAY

## AND THE BATTLE FOR NORMANDY

# Welcome



There are very few moments in history in which you can see the shape of world events shift in just 24 hours. D-Day was one of those rare occasions. Although the Second World War would rumble on for another year, 6 June 1944 marked the beginning of the end. Its fallout was felt across the globe.

Looking back with the comfort of hindsight, it's easy to forget that, in 1944, the success of an Allied invasion was no foregone conclusion. The night before the landings, Dwight D Eisenhower, supreme Allied commander, drafted a short message for the invading forces. Scrawled in pencil, it accepted all responsibility for the failure of the invasion and the withdrawal of Allied troops from France. As it turned out, the note was never needed – it remained tucked in Eisenhower's wallet.

The scale of the operation was mind-boggling. It was a massive enterprise, reliant on the contributions of countless men and women, from infantrymen and paratroopers to pilots, scientists, factory workers and Resistance agents.

Released to mark the 75th anniversary year of the landings, this special edition brings together some of those incredible personal stories, charting the dramatic events of 6 June 1944 hour by hour, and the bitter battle to liberate Nazi-occupied France that followed.

**Ellie Cawthorne**, Editor



# Contents

## 6 Introduction

Why the D-Day landings played an important role during the Second World War

## ROAD TO D-DAY

### 10 Timeline

The dramatic chain of wartime events that led up to the launch of Operation Overlord

### 14 The Masterplan

How the Allied strategy to liberate Europe took shape, from war room discussions to technological innovations

### 22 Getting Ready for Action

The demanding and dangerous training regimes undertaken by troops in preparation for the invasion

## HOUR BY HOUR

### 28 Night 00:00–06:00

The ambitious opening stages of Operation Overlord, as paratroopers descended from the skies and an armada of ships approached northern France

### 40 Morning 06:00–12:00

What happened when the first waves of Allied soldiers began their daring assault on the landing beaches

### 56 Afternoon 12:00–17:00

The pivotal moments as troops continued the difficult push inland, meeting tough German resistance

### 66 Evening 17:00–00:00

How the Allies tightened their grip on Normandy as the 'Longest Day' came to an end

## AFTERMATH & LEGACY

### 78 The Battle for Normandy

The gruelling battle that unfolded as Allied forces fought to secure their foothold in northern France

### 88 The Road to Victory

Milestones in the aftermath of the battle of Normandy, as the Allies pushed through Nazi-occupied Europe on the road to victory

### 92 Operation Overlord: The Big Questions

Historian Antony Beevor tackles the successes and failures of D-Day and the Normandy campaign

### 100 D-Day on Screen

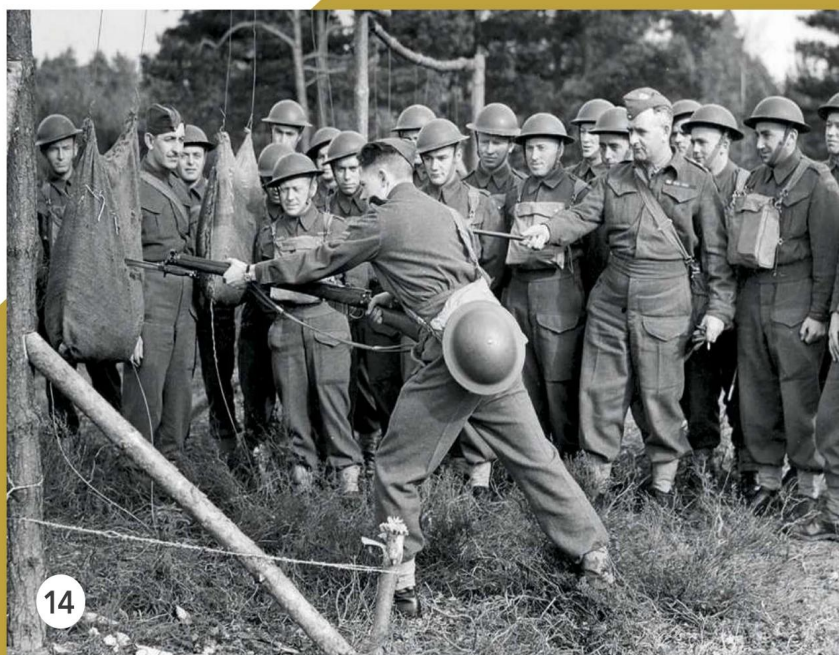
Five key depictions of D-Day on film and television, from *The Longest Day* to *Saving Private Ryan*

### 104 Visiting Normandy

The sites that shaped the Allied invasion and continue to inspire visitors today

### 110 Conclusion

How D-Day's remarkable legacy still looms large, 75 years on









# RISKING IT ALL

As the first wave of troops landed on the beaches of Normandy on 6 June 1944, the prospect of freeing western Europe from years of Nazi occupation finally became a reality. But as the largest seaborne invasion in history got underway, victory for the Allies was still far from certain

BY NIGEL JONES

**W**hen Churchill described D-Day as a “vast operation... undoubtedly the most complicated and difficult that has ever occurred”, the legendary leader was probably understating, rather than exaggerating, the scale of the task ahead.

Operation Overlord, as the Allied invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944 was code-named, was certainly vast. On that single decisive day, some 7,000 vessels – ranging from battleships to landing craft – delivered a huge army of American, British and Canadian men on five beaches in northern France while being battered by stormy weather. And the scope of the operation reached far beyond those who were tasked with making the daring dash from sea to beach.

Their arrival that day was preceded by thousands of parachute and glider drops by airborne special forces to seize vital inland strongpoints, and was accompanied

by bombing raids and attacks by the French Resistance to cripple road and rail links, which would prevent the Germans from rushing tanks up and throwing the invaders back in the sea.

The cost was heavy. Around 4,500 Allied soldiers were killed on D-Day alone, along with at least as many of their German opponents. The risks had been so high that D-Day’s commander-in-chief, US general Dwight D “Ike” Eisenhower,

even drafted a statement in advance accepting blame for the potential catastrophe. However, the prize on offer was enormous. The ultimate goal of what Ike called his ‘crusade’ was the liberation of Europe from four years of brutal Nazi tyranny, and the destruction of Hitler’s genocidal regime. D-Day, for all its devastation, paved the way for that important objective.

## DESPERATE MEASURES

Operation Overlord was the culmination of months of careful, painstaking preparation and had been a long time in the making. Ever since Hitler had invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, Stalin had been pressing for Britain to relieve the pressure he was under by opening a second front against the Germans in western Europe. But only following Hitler’s declaration of war on the US, after Japan attacked the American fleet at Pearl Harbor that December, did such an invasion become a practical possibility.

The ultimate goal was the liberation of Europe from four years of brutal Nazi tyranny





#### READY TO POUNCE

US Army troops pictured during preparations for D-Day, on which they would tackle the heavily fortified Normandy coastline

With the immense industrial, manpower and military resources of the US now fully engaged, Allied planners began to grapple with the problems of such a giant undertaking. An amphibious seaborne landing on a fortified and well-defended coastline would be an especially difficult operation to achieve. Military history is littered with bloody failures, such as the disastrous Gallipoli campaign against Turkey in 1915 during the First World War. Ironically, Winston Churchill himself had been one of the architects of that fiasco, and was only too aware of the possibility that D-Day could end up being a similar failure.

These fears were only reinforced in August 1942, when a large raid by Canadian troops was mounted against the Normandy port of Dieppe as a sort of rehearsal for D-Day. Due to inadequate planning and preparation, the raid was a disaster. Armoured vehicles were unable to get off the pebbled beach, casualties were heavy, and those troops who were not

killed, wounded or captured ended up being withdrawn.

#### BREAKING THROUGH

German field marshal Erwin Rommel was the man tasked with organising the formidable defences of northern France and strengthening what became known as the 'Atlantic Wall'. He set about the job with his usual energy, littering the beaches of Normandy with mines and underwater obstacles, and peppering the coastline with a combination of concrete bunkers and pillboxes in the belief that the invaders had to be stopped at the sea – or they would not be stopped at all. When it finally arrived, D-Day, he famously predicted, would be, "the longest day".

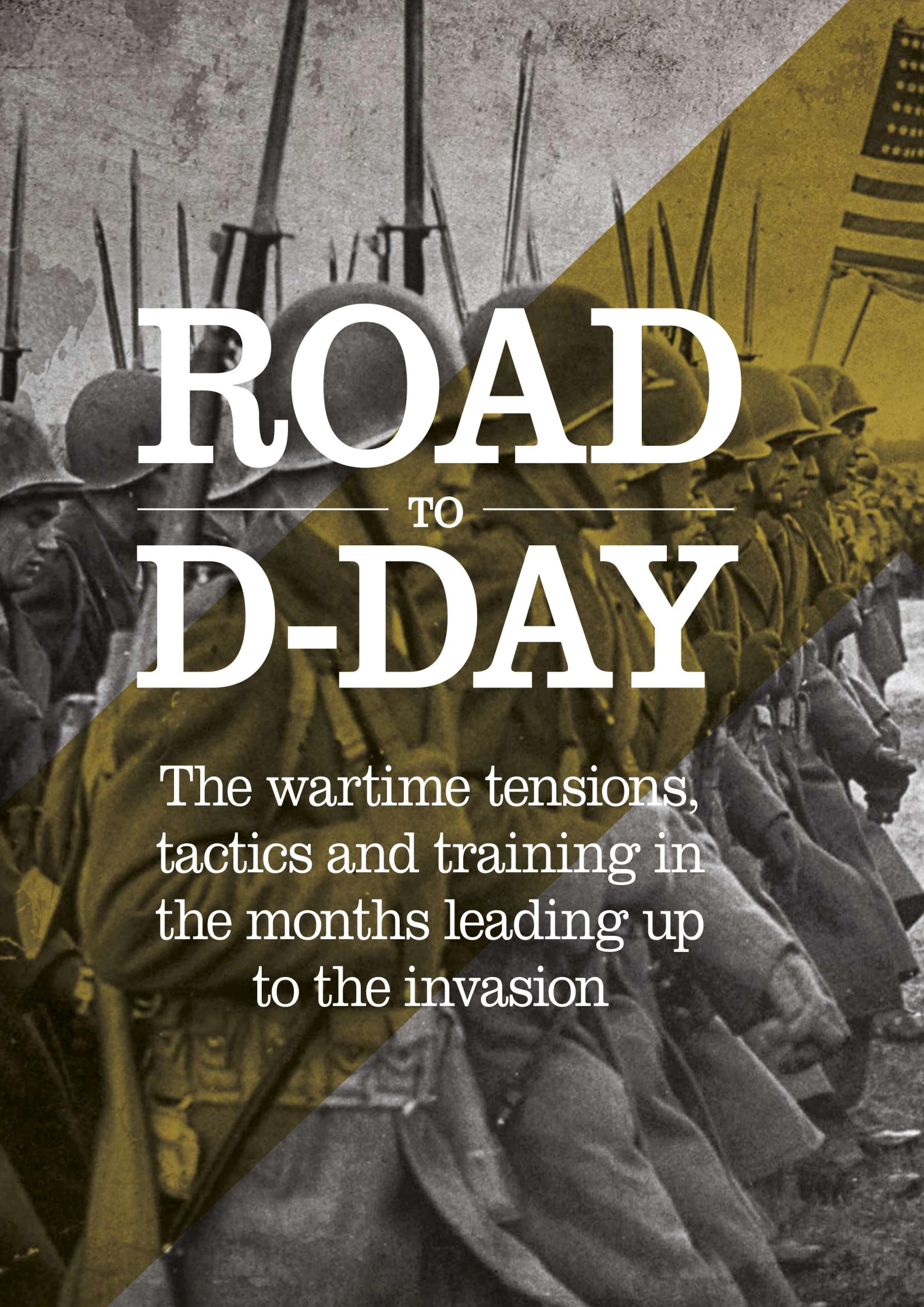
Meanwhile, the Allies, still jabbing at the Axis's 'soft underbelly' in the Mediterranean, had successfully stormed and conquered Sicily in July 1943, and then invaded Fascist Italy itself with beach landings at Salerno and Anzio. By D-Day they had gruelling, but highly valuable,

experience of such operations. But no matter how prepared the Allies were, nothing was certain.

Operation Overlord was successfully cloaked in secrecy, so although the Germans knew that the invasion would come, they did not know when or where the Allies would land. A huge deception plan, Operation Fortitude, involving a phantom army complete with dummy tanks and aircraft, fooled the Nazis into believing that the Allies would choose the shortest direct route across the Channel to the port of Calais.

So convinced was Adolf Hitler that D-Day was an elaborate trick that he kept two armoured Panzer divisions in reserve around Calais, waiting for a second invasion that never came. By the time he realized that D-Day was the real thing, it was too late. The bridgeheads around the Normandy beaches were already filling with hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers, ready to fight for the liberation of Nazi-occupied Europe. ●





# ROAD — TO — D-DAY

The wartime tensions,  
tactics and training in  
the months leading up  
to the invasion





GETTY IMAGES/DEAMSTIME

**BROTHERS IN ARMS**

American glider troops take part in a military parade shortly before being called into action on D-Day



# TIMELINE

The dramatic chain of wartime events that led to the launch of Operation Overlord in 1944

BY NIGEL JONES

## September 1939

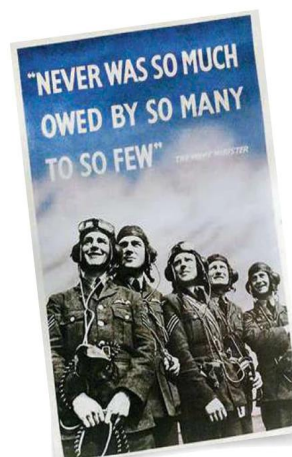
Britain and France declare war on Germany following **Hitler's invasion of Poland**. The Nazis conquer the country within five weeks, bombing Warsaw. Jews are persecuted and herded into ghettos. The Soviet Union invades and occupies eastern Poland.

## May 1940

**Hitler launches a Blitzkrieg**, or lightning war, invading France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg using a series of coordinated armour and air attacks. French defences are quickly penetrated and overwhelmed, the Allies split in two, and the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) retreats to the Channel coast.



German soldiers celebrate the capture of Dieppe



A propaganda poster drawing upon the heroics of the RAF during the Battle of Britain

## August 1940

Inspired by Churchill's defiant radio speeches, the people of Britain prepare to resist invasion. The Royal Air Force (RAF), helped by Polish and Czech pilots in exile, fight **the Battle of Britain** over southern England against attacks from Germany's Luftwaffe (air force) with Spitfire and Hurricane fighter aircraft.



TOP/PHOTO/GETTY IMAGES



German warships attack the Norwegian port of Narvik

## June 1940

The **Nazi conquest of France** is completed with the fall of Paris and formation of the defeatist French Vichy government. General Charles de Gaulle forms the Free French movement in London to continue the struggle. Nearly 340,000 **Allied troops are evacuated across the Channel from Dunkirk**.

## September 1940

**Beginning of the Blitz** - a sustained campaign of air raids on London and other British cities and ports by the German Luftwaffe. Although thousands die and many buildings are destroyed, the eight-month assault fails to break the morale of the population.

## April 1940

After months of quiet 'phony war', the **Germans attack Denmark and Norway**. Denmark is conquered in hours, but Britain and France land troops in Norway in an attempt to repel the invaders. The Allied campaign is a fiasco, leading to a **political crisis in Britain** in which Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain is replaced by Winston Churchill.

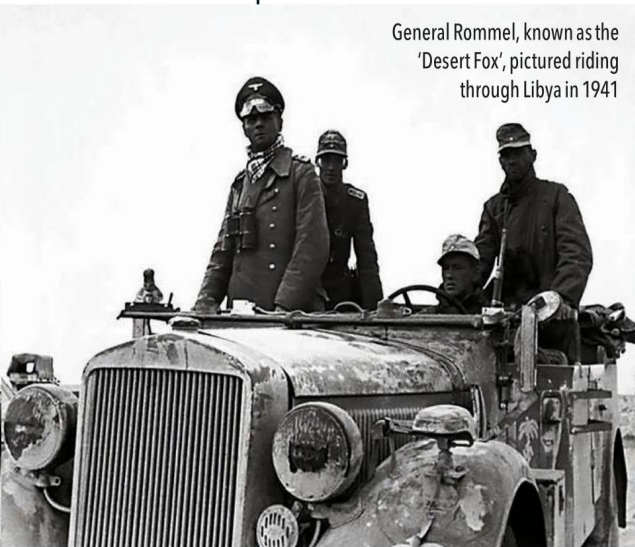


Although this particular image was staged, life carried on despite the horrors of the Blitz



## April 1941

Germany invades the Balkans, occupying Yugoslavia and Greece, while German general **Erwin Rommel** launches an offensive in **North Africa**, reaching the Libyan port of Tobruk. A pro-German coup in Iraq is crushed by British troops, who also liberate the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa from its Italian occupiers.



General Rommel, known as the 'Desert Fox', pictured riding through Libya in 1941

Soviet soldiers surrender to German forces during Operation Barbarossa

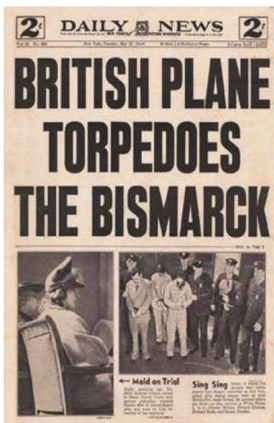


## June 1941

Hitler launches **Operation Barbarossa**, invading the **Soviet Union** in a massive attack that destroys the Soviet air force and encircles thousands of troops. Despite receiving advance warnings of the coming assault, the Soviet dictator Stalin ignores them. The extermination of Jewish people behind Nazi lines also begins.

## December 1941

**Japanese aircraft strike the US fleet at Pearl Harbor**, Hawaii. The US responds by declaring war on Japan. Four days later, **Germany and Italy declare war on the US** in support of Japan. In Russia, German troops reach the suburbs of Moscow and besiege Leningrad. Japan attacks several Asian states, including those within the British empire.



GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

## May 1941

The **war at sea reaches new heights** with the sinking of the German battleship *Bismarck*. Over the course of the war, U-boats will sink nearly 4,000 Allied ships. The Kriegsmarine will lose more than 780 submarines and over 50 surface vessels. On 11 May, the day the Blitz ends, Hitler's deputy **Rudolf Hess is captured** flying to Scotland on an abortive one-man peace mission.

## August 1941

Churchill meets FDR aboard the British battleship *Prince of Wales* in Placentia Bay, Canada. **They sign the Atlantic Charter**, declaring their goals for the world after the war and committing the Allies to support postwar human rights.

## March 1941

US president **Franklin D Roosevelt (FDR)** signs the **Lend Lease Act**, handing Britain, China and the Soviet Union defence and military equipment to oppose Germany and its ally, Japan. By the end of the war, the US has offered lend-lease aid to more than 40 nations.



FDR (left) and Churchill meet to discuss the war in August 1941



## January 1942

Chaired by SS chiefs Reinhard Heydrich (below) and Adolf Eichmann, Nazi officials meet at the Wannsee Conference in Berlin to draw up **plans for the deportation and extermination of all European Jews**. This ultimately leads to the Holocaust, in which around six million are murdered.



A beach strewn with helmets following the failed Allied raid on Dieppe in August 1942



GETTY IMAGES

## August 1942

Canadian and British forces carry out a **raid on the French port of Dieppe**. A dress rehearsal for D-Day, the operation is a failure, with more than 50 per cent casualties. Over in Russia, the German Sixth Army reaches Stalingrad.

## May 1942

The RAF carries out the first **'thousand-bomber raid'** against Germany, decimating Cologne in an attack dubbed Operation Millennium. It is the first of many heavy raids that will eventually strike every major German city.

## November 1942

Anglo-American forces land on the North African coast in **Operation Torch** and seize Morocco and Algeria, which are ruled by Vichy France. The **Germans occupy Vichy France** in reprisal, but the French scuttle their own fleet in the port of Toulon.



Japanese magazine *Asahi Graph* reports on the taking of Singapore in February 1942

## May 1942

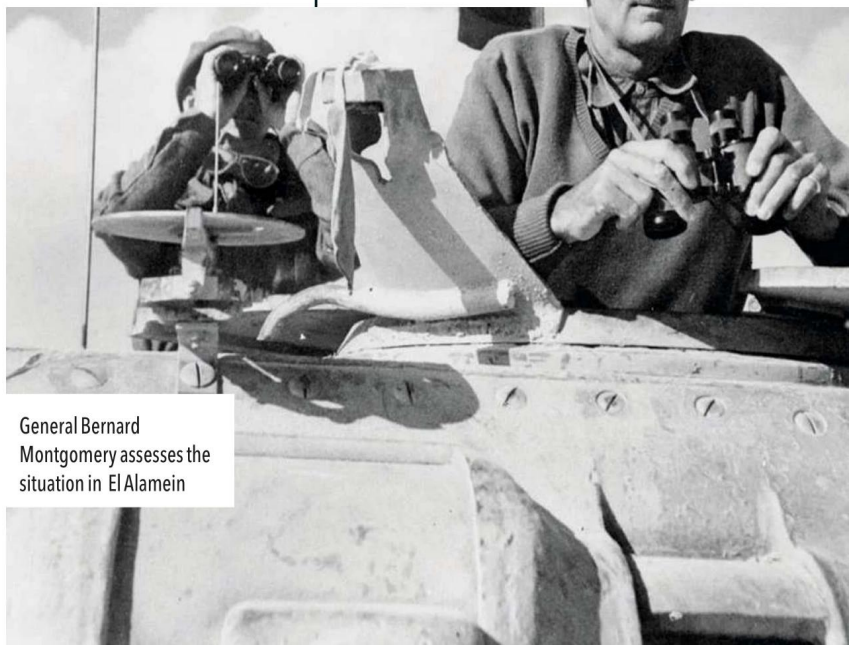
SS chief Reinhard Heydrich is **mortally wounded in an assassination attempt** by British trained agents in Czechoslovakia. It is the most spectacular of many attempted attacks carried out by resistance groups across Nazi-occupied Europe, but hundreds are murdered in reprisals. In June, the US Navy defeats the Japanese fleet in **the battle of Midway**.

## October 1942

British Commonwealth forces, led by Bernard Montgomery, decisively **defeat Germany's Afrika Korps and units of the Italian army at El Alamein** in Egypt. The turning point in the North Africa campaign, it triggers a German retreat to their final stronghold in Tunisia.

## February 1942

After sinking British warships *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* off Malaya, **Japan takes Singapore** with little resistance. Around 130,000 British, Indian and Australasian troops go into brutal captivity that many will not survive. Japan launches air raids on Darwin in northern Australia.



General Bernard Montgomery assesses the situation in El Alamein





### February 1943

After a five-month battle, the remnants of the encircled German Sixth and Fourth armies at Stalingrad surrender to the Soviets. Over **90,000 prisoners go into Soviet captivity**, including Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus (above).

### September 1943

German commandos rescue Mussolini from captivity, allowing Hitler to set him up as puppet ruler of Salo, a republic in Nazi-controlled northern Italy. However, the **Allied forces soon invade the Italian mainland**, landing at Salerno and later Anzio, advancing further up the peninsula.



### November 1943

**Stalin, FDR and Churchill meet** in Tehran, Iran, and agree on Allied strategy for the coming year. Churchill and FDR **pledge to open a second front in Europe** by invading France.

### March 1944

The Allies begin **Operation Fortitude**, an elaborate deception plan designed to trick Germany into believing that an invasion of Europe could begin anywhere from Norway to the Mediterranean. In fact, **the target is Normandy**.



Hamburg burns in this artistic depiction of the devastating firestorm raids on the city

### January 1944

US general Dwight D 'Ike' Eisenhower, commander of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), is tasked with spearheading **preparations for D-Day** - the planned invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe. Though Ike is inexperienced in combat, his administrative ability, meticulous planning and conciliatory approach will prove vital to the operation's success.

### April 1944

**Preparations for Operation Overlord intensify** as Eisenhower moves SHAEF from London to Southwick House near Portsmouth - a main coastal embarkation point for the invasion. Meanwhile, a D-Day training exercise at Slapton Sands in Devon goes horribly wrong when friendly fire and a German E-boat attack kill 946 GIs. ●

### July 1943

An RAF firestorm raid on Hamburg kills 30,000 people. **Anglo-US armies invade and conquer Sicily**, which leads to the overthrow of Italy's fascist dictator, Mussolini. In western Russia, the world's biggest tank battle at Kursk sees the Germans beaten, losing nearly 800 tanks and 70,000 men.



US troops leave the British coastal town of Weymouth ahead of the D-Day landings in June 1944





# THE MASTER PLAN

Landing successfully in Normandy and conquering Europe would require more than brute force. If the Allies stood any chance of success on D-Day, it would also take the combined efforts of scientists, military tacticians and the French Resistance to plot the route to victory – long before any bullets could be fired

BY PAUL REED





GETTY IMAGES

**ALL MAPPED OUT**  
Eisenhower (centre) makes plans for the invasion from SHAEF headquarters

**O**n the afternoon of 16 January 1944, the midget submarine X20 approached the shoreline of what would later become Omaha beach on D-Day. While it was still daylight, X20 sat at periscope depth as its two-man crew surveyed the beach area. Then, when darkness descended, the submarine moved within 400 yards of the shore, allowing its crew members to swim in.

The men bore no explosives and their task was not to destroy or kill. Instead they carried scientific equipment to gather sand samples, along with condoms to place them in so they would not be damaged when taking them back. Once analysed on dry land, the samples would then be used to ascertain which beaches would be best to land on.

As demonstrated by the failure of tanks and equipment to get ashore during the ill-fated Dieppe raid in August 1942, the geology of the battlefield was shown to be just as important as knowing where the bunkers and barbed wire were located. And what these two naval officers did was just one small – but crucial – part of the complex steps taken to plan D-Day.

Indeed, successfully carrying out the largest amphibious operation in history did not happen by accident. It took years of planning, preparation, research, development and thinking beyond the norm to make the invasion possible. Operation Overlord was fought and won not just by men with bombs and bayonets, but also by ‘back-room boys’. It was the truly the boffins’ war, and scientists, engineers and planners were at the heart of it all.

## FINDING A WAY IN

When Allied commanders were coming up with the best strategies to defeat Nazi Germany, the American view was that the quickest route to the heart of the Reich was to land in France, take Paris, and then advance through the Low Countries →





#### INVADING ITALY

British troops advance through Sicily, in what is likely a propaganda image. Churchill thought the Mediterranean would be the Reich's 'soft underbelly'

and into the Rhineland. However, such a proposition was not possible when the North Africa campaign came to an end in May 1943, as not enough men, specialist equipment or landing craft were available for an operation on that scale. Instead, the war dragged on in the Mediterranean, with the capture of Sicily in August 1943 and then invasion of mainland Italy at Salerno that September.

While some leaders like Winston Churchill hoped that Italy would prove to be the 'soft underbelly' of the Third Reich, in the end it became what veterans called 'the tough old gut'. Despite drawing German troops away from France and Russia, it soon became apparent that victory would only become possible with an invasion of France.

But where to land? In the summer of 1940, the German high command had made plans for Operation Sea Lion, the invasion of Britain, intending to use the narrow English Channel as their route. This certainly offered the quickest way to France, but with the construction of a huge screen of beach defences known as

## Gathering information was dangerous and many Resistance members paid with their lives

the 'Atlantic Wall', this section of coastline boasted some of the strongest German positions, making any Allied landing potentially costly.

As a result, plans were put in place to scour the French coast and find an alternative site. RAF reconnaissance aircraft began by snapping thousands of aerial photos and carrying out low-level sweeps (not without suffering losses), while maps were produced to identify locations that had good road networks to allow an invasion force to move inland. The British government even made a public appeal for postcards of towns and

villages on the French coast that could be used for intelligence purposes.

However, valuable input also came from members of the French Resistance, who helped create a record of German construction of Atlantic Wall defences, especially as they were beefed up following the appointment of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel to oversee them. Gathering such information was highly dangerous and many Resistance members paid the price with their lives.

Along with the geological data gathered by submarine teams, the Allied commanders gradually managed to build a picture of which areas offered the best chance of success.

### GATHERING PACE

The initial decision to land in Normandy was made by the chief of staff to the supreme allied commander (COSSAC) in 1943, Lieutenant-General Frederick Morgan. His team ruled out the Pas-de-Calais region and saw a landing between the Cotentin peninsula and near to Caen as being the most suitable.



## Guillaume Mercader: THE FRENCH CYCLIST SPY

Guillaume Mercader was one of those individuals who seemed to have it all, a dashing Gallic pin-up with a fine nose and a slick of jet-black hair. A champion cyclist known for his charm and charisma, he requested permission from the Gestapo (in the spring of 1944) to continue training along the coastal road of Normandy – a road that had been declared a forbidden zone by the German authorities because it was the point of access for all the defences of Rommel's Atlantic Wall.

Such was his charm that his request was accepted. The soldiers who saw him on his bike had no inkling that he was diligently noting every pillbox, bunker and machine-gun nest. It was an *espionage de folie*: Mercader was the only spy in history to gather intelligence from the saddle of a La Perle racing bicycle, dressed in lightweight

shorts and a skin-tight jersey.

Once he'd collected the latest information, he would cycle over to 1 Rue Saint-Malo in Bayeux (headquarters of the local resistance) where his reports were transmitted by wireless to England. There they were processed by the Special Operations Executive and then forwarded to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEPF). Within a few hours of Guillaume Mercader cycling along that coastal road, the architects of Operation Overlord were in possession of the latest news of the German beach defences.

This was invaluable, for the success or failure of D-Day was to be dependent on the seaborne assault of the coastline. Mercader knew that a great number of men – more than two million troops, in fact – were stationed

After gathering intelligence for the Resistance, Guillaume Mercader survived the war and lived until the age of 93

in England, all of them awaiting shipment to France. The lives of many of those soldiers, and certainly those in the first wave, would be dependent on the accuracy of his intelligence.

WORDS: GILES MILTON

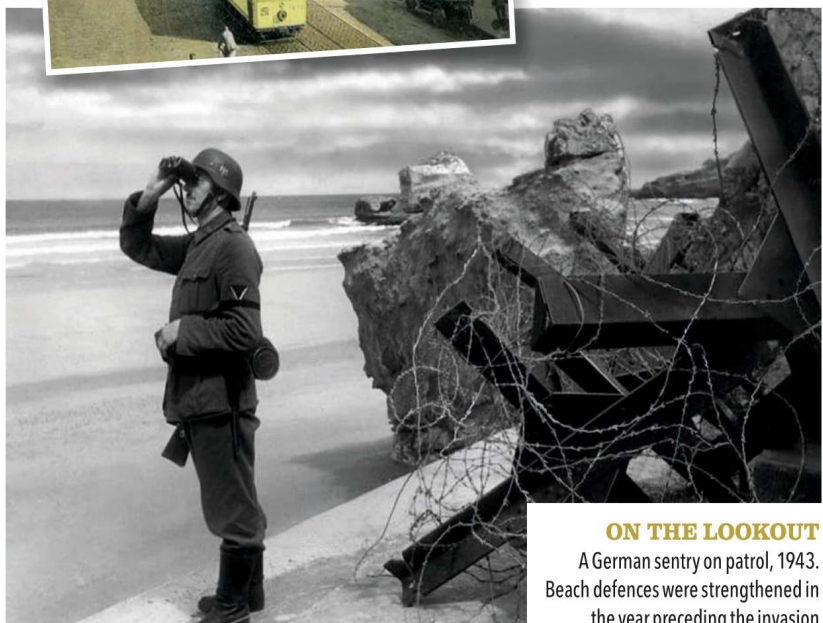
At this stage in the war, due to lack of men and equipment, Morgan recommended landing on three beaches along the Normandy coastline, but this was later expanded to five. The work of the Resistance had indicated that there were fewer defences in Normandy than in the Pas-de-Calais, with many bunkers containing antiquated firepower from the First World War. Indeed, some of the bunker complexes were only partially completed. The mapping had also demonstrated good roads to get landing troops off the beach area and inland, and to take them beyond on the long road to liberation.

With plans gathering pace, Churchill and President Roosevelt met in Quebec in August 1943 and confirmed these decisions in a secretive conference known as 'Quadrant'. After some small changes, a provisional date of May 1944 was decided upon and Operation Overlord was born.

At this point it was evident that a supreme commander of allied forces needed to be appointed to oversee the operation. Churchill may have preferred



Seaside postcards collected on holiday in France became crucial pieces of intelligence



### ON THE LOOKOUT

A German sentry on patrol, 1943. Beach defences were strengthened in the year preceding the invasion →



## FUNNY BUSINESS

An AVRE 'carpet-layer' – one of the adapted tanks designed to aid the invasion



a British commander such as Frederick Morgan, Harold Alexander or even Bernard Montgomery, but Roosevelt instead proposed General Dwight D Eisenhower. As the Americans were in many ways the more powerful of the two partners, the president's recommendation was approved at a conference in Cairo in December 1943.

## CATHERINE WHEELS AND FUNNIES

Having decided where to land, the means to affect the invasion now became a pressing concern. Eisenhower oversaw the build-up of British and Canadian troops, with some of the latter having been in England as early as 1939. By spring 1944, more than one million Americans had also arrived in the country, and along with the rest of the Allied forces, they too needed to be trained for the invasion.

Units like the US 29th Division in the West Country were drilled to such a level of efficiency they became the Allied armies' experts on amphibious warfare. Mock bunkers and sections of the Atlantic Wall were built to help with their training, while along the coast of Devon, concrete landing craft were constructed so that GIs could train exiting them and hitting the beach time and time again.

But to break through Rommel's Atlantic Wall, it became clear that manpower and firepower alone would not be enough. It seemed easy just to bomb the beach areas where the landings would take place, but it was realised this would create a 'crater zone' across the landing

areas that could in fact impede progress. Precision bombing did not exist, so to get through the complex and varied defences that protected the D-Day beaches, specialist equipment would be needed.

Churchill and Eisenhower spent a lot of time in early 1944 being shown designs and mock-ups of all sorts of inventions to help achieve this. Some of them were rather fanciful, such as the 'Catherine wheel' – an explosive device that was meant to roll across the beach taking out the defences, but could easily go into a spin and return just as quickly to the troops who launched it.

Meanwhile, the British developed adapted tanks known as 'funnies' that

could breach German defences or assist the men who would land on the D-Day beaches. A lot of these designs were based around British-built Churchill tanks, with the Armoured Vehicle Royal Engineer (AVRE) being most common.

Thicker armour would help the vehicles survive anti-tank weapons, while their main guns were replaced by Petard spigot mortars firing what the British called a 'flying dustbin' that could demolish concrete structures. The tanks could also carry bundles of brushwood to drop in bomb craters so they could be crossed, scissor bridges to get over obstacles and walls, or bobbins of carpet matting to allow vehicles to cross easily over areas of soft sand.

In addition, the Valentine tank was adapted so it could float ashore using flotation screens, but this was eventually replaced by the Sherman Duplex Drive tank, which was implemented in large numbers by the time D-Day arrived. On the British landing beaches, the arrival of Shermans among the assault infantry often helped tip the balance and enabled men to get off the beach and make their way inland.

## ASSEMBLING THE ARMADA

However, tanks, men and weapons were of no use if they could not be landed on the Normandy coastline. The supreme commanders knew that substantial



## CONCRETE CRAFT

A practice landing craft in Devon, built to help troops hit the beach with precision

GETTY IMAGES/ALMAY/THE TELEGRAPH-ANDY HALL





Commando George Lane had an extraordinary encounter with Rommel

## George Lane: THE UNDERCOVER AGENT

George Lane was addicted to risk: it was what had driven him to join the British commandos. It had also led him to volunteer for a perilous spring mission, Operation Tarbrush X.

On 17 May 1944, he was to smuggle himself into Nazi-occupied France in order to seek intelligence on a new type of mine that the Germans were installing on the Normandy beaches.

Lane's mission turned to disaster when he was captured off the French coast. Blindfolded and bundled into a car, he was driven to a nearby chateau. He assumed he would be shot, but events were to take a more bizarre turn.

"Do you realise you are about to meet someone very important?" said his German guard. "You are going to meet His Excellency Field Marshal Rommel." Lane was knocked sideways. Rommel, the 'Desert Fox', was the general in charge of Normandy's coastal defences. Rommel arrived soon after and began his interrogation. "So you are one of these gangster commandos, are you?" he said. Lane was full of bravado as he turned to his translator. "Please tell His Excellency that I do not understand what he means by gangster commandos. Gangsters are gangsters, but the commandos are the best soldiers in the world." Rommel seemed to appreciate the answer, for a brief smile swept his face. "Perhaps you are not a gangster," he said, "but we've had some very bad experiences concerning commandos". This much was true. Over previous months, Lane's fellow commandos in X-Troop had staged a series of raids on the French coastline.

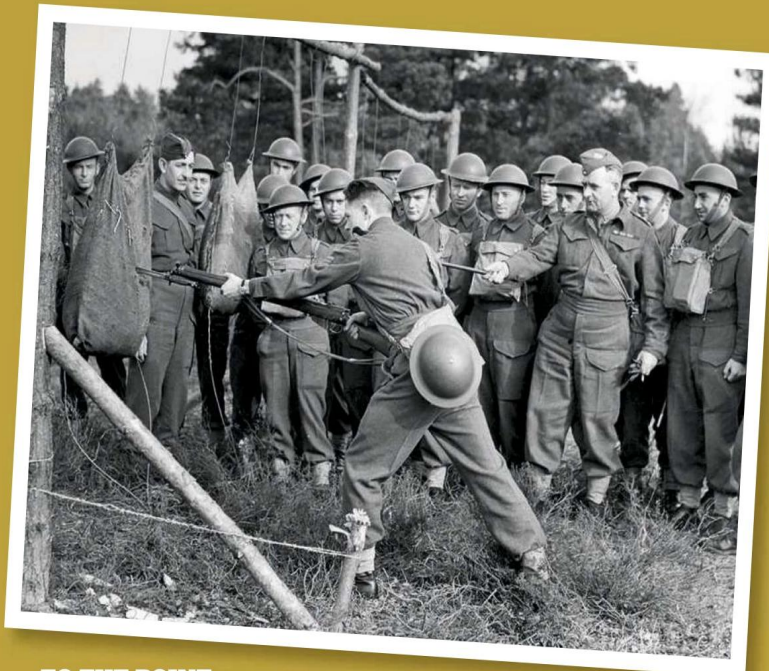
Rommel did his best to extract information about the planned landings, but Lane revealed nothing. He was convinced he would be shot – in line with Hitler's Commando Order – but Rommel had a sneaking admiration for this brave and charming Brit. Instead of executing him, he sent him to a prisoner of war camp. True to form, George Lane soon escaped.

WORDS: GILES MILTON



### FIRING LINE

A Canadian soldier is put through his paces during training in England, 1942

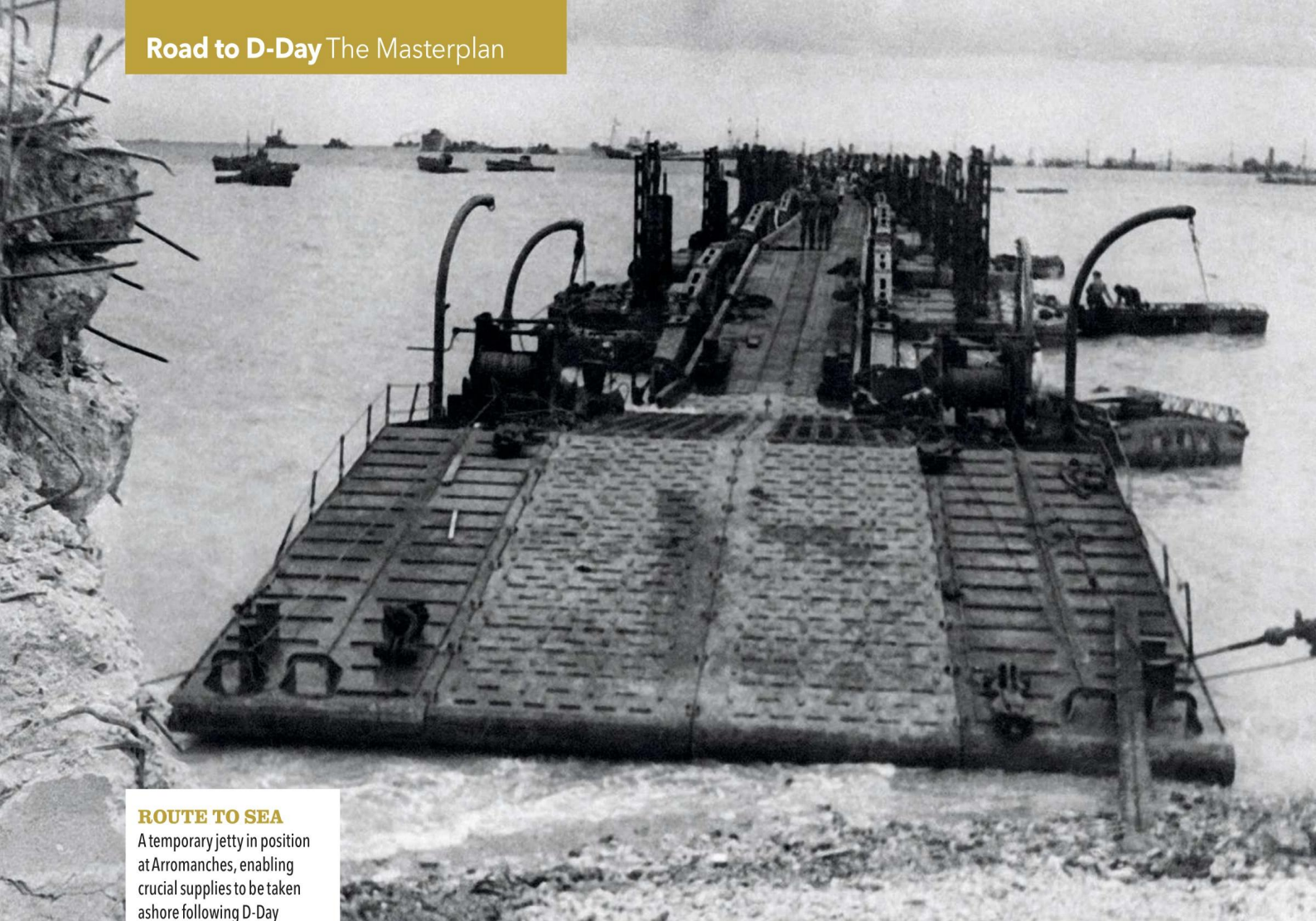


### TO THE POINT

Soldiers prepare themselves for hand-to-hand combat by learning bayonet skills







### ROUTE TO SEA

A temporary jetty in position at Arromanches, enabling crucial supplies to be taken ashore following D-Day

investment in the naval side of Overlord – code-named Operation Neptune – was essential.

Under the command of Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, who had presided over the evacuation of Dunkirk in 1940, Neptune comprised a naval force of nearly 7,000 vessels from eight different navies. Among them were landing craft of every shape and size, which would put tanks and vehicles ashore, launch rockets on the defences and take men in for ‘H-Hour’ – the time of the assault on each beach.

For the British, the most common craft was the Landing Craft Assault (LCA). This 41ft boat had a crew of four and could carry 31 combat troops. With a good speed and rapidly deployable ramp, it was ideal for the amphibious nature of D-Day’s combined operations.

In contrast, the Americans instead chose to deploy the US-made Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel (LCVP) or ‘Higgins boat’. Faster and shorter than the British LCA, it could transport 36 men and had a quick drop ramp at the front that allowed a rapid exit. These proved to be so successful on D-Day that General Eisenhower later said of the boat’s

## As preparations for Overlord entered their final phase, the need for deception was paramount

inventor: “Andrew Higgins is the man who won the war for us.”

One aspect that Lieutenant-General Morgan had highlighted during the early planning for Operation Overlord was the use of artificial harbours. No army can advance without fuel, food or ammunition, and all of this needed to be brought over, landed and then distributed. There was no port in the landing area suitable for the purpose, as they were all too small.

Instead the Allies would have to bring their own harbours with them, and thus the Mulberry harbour was devised. Perhaps one of the most amazing scientific achievements of the whole operation, its walls were made from massive floating concrete sections that could be towed across, flooded and then used to make what Churchill had said needed to be a port as “big as Dover”. One was available for the British sector

at Arromanches and a second was built at Omaha beach after D-Day. A storm destroyed the American one, but the British harbour was repaired and kept open well into 1945, supplying the invasion and paving the way for logistical success.

### FOOLING THE ENEMY

As preparations for Operation Overlord entered their final phase, the need for deception was paramount. It was almost impossible to hide such a mammoth invasion force, so intelligence officers decided to exploit this fact by creating a dummy army made up of inflatable tanks and vehicles as part of an elaborate plan known as Operation Fortitude.

‘Led’ by the renowned US general George S Patton, the ghost army was positioned in the south-east, giving credence to the idea that an invasion force



would really land in the Pas-de-Calais and anything else was a diversion. In addition, in the final 24–48 hours before D-Day, the RAF dropped tons of metal strips along the French coast. In great enough density, these would confuse enemy radar and stop the Germans from discovering the airborne armada that would bring in the men in the early hours of D-Day.

Dummy parachutists were dropped far away from the actual intended dropzones, in order to confuse the Germans as to

where a main invasion would occur. These methods and many others were all part of arguably the most successful deception plan in military history and helped to ensure Allied success on the Normandy beaches.

On the night of 6 June 1944, Churchill and Eisenhower – both sitting in their war rooms – received messages that D-Day had been a success. More than 150,000 men were ashore, and while some of the landings had been easier than others, it seemed that victory was now finally in sight.

The bravery and tenacity of combat troops on the ground had made it possible, but it was also the scientists, engineers, factory workers, pilots and frogmen that helped make D-Day the crucial moment of the Second World War that it was. ●

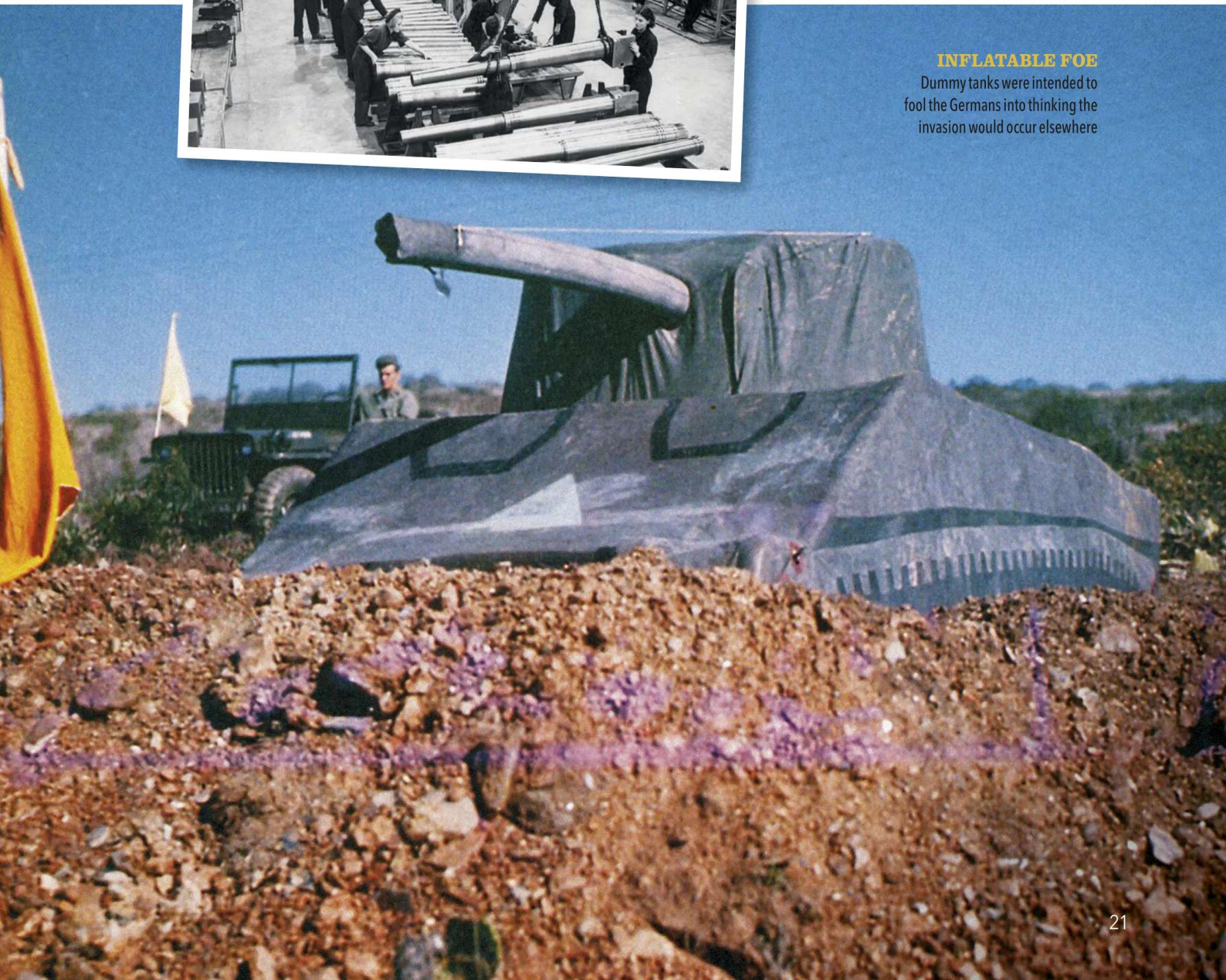
#### TEAM EFFORT

British women on a gun assembly line. Thousands like them toiled in factories on the Allied home fronts



#### INFLATABLE FOE

Dummy tanks were intended to fool the Germans into thinking the invasion would occur elsewhere





Members of a British parachute regiment consult their maps during a training exercise just weeks before D-Day. Training was intensive – and dangerous

# GETTING READY FOR ACTION

As their plans to liberate Europe gathered pace, the Allies knew that every stage of the invasion would have to be carried out with razor-like precision. Soon, thousands of troops were being put through rigorous training exercises – some of which turned out to be as deadly as the real thing

BY PETER CADDICK-ADAMS



# Land

Before the troops could leave Britain's shores, they would have to conquer Devon first

On the eve of the invasion, the build-up of troops in the British Isles was so large, servicemen joked that Britain was only being kept afloat by the number of barrage balloons attached to her. Indeed, a total of 2,876,600 soldiers, sailors and airmen were awaiting the call in southern England, and key to their success on D-Day would be the fact that each and every one of them had experienced far longer and more meaningful combat preparation than their opponents across the Channel.

However, as US infantry divisions underwent extensive training along the coast of Devon, accidents were not uncommon. Many of the exercises were necessarily dangerous, involving live artillery, mines and machine gun fire.

Captain Charles R Cawthon remembered the sad fate that befell one member of his platoon, who triggered a mine laid in the dunes: "There was a blinding flash and a clap of sound, and he disappeared as if by a magician's sleight of hand. The illusion terminated in pieces of anatomy plopping into the sand around us."

Another American officer, Second-Lieutenant Wesley R Ross, recalled: "The day before we left for the marshal-

ling area, we lost Melvin Vest, who was killed when a quarter-pound block of TNT exploded in his hand. I bundled up Vest and hustled him by truck to a nearby hospital, but he died of shock four hours later from extensive damage to his hands, legs and groin. This was a gut-wrenching disaster, and the fact that he was such a neat guitar-playing soldier and so well liked by everyone, made it even more of a tragedy."

When the time finally came to head across to Normandy, large crowds of locals lined the streets to wish the departing men both goodbye and good luck, sensing this time that the troops would not be returning.

Omaha beach-bound Sergeant Hyam Haas, a draftee from Brooklyn, remembered a moving sight as they travelled towards their marshalling areas. "When we left Exmouth on 30 May, the townsfolk lined the streets and cheered us on - many of them in tears. It seemed as if the entire nation was in motion... This was the biggest parade ever; the only thing missing were the marching bands. There was constant cheering as we went through towns - everyone knew what was happening."

Many exercises, such as this US operation on the English coast, involved live artillery



Members of a parachute regiment surge forward into the open English countryside in March 1944



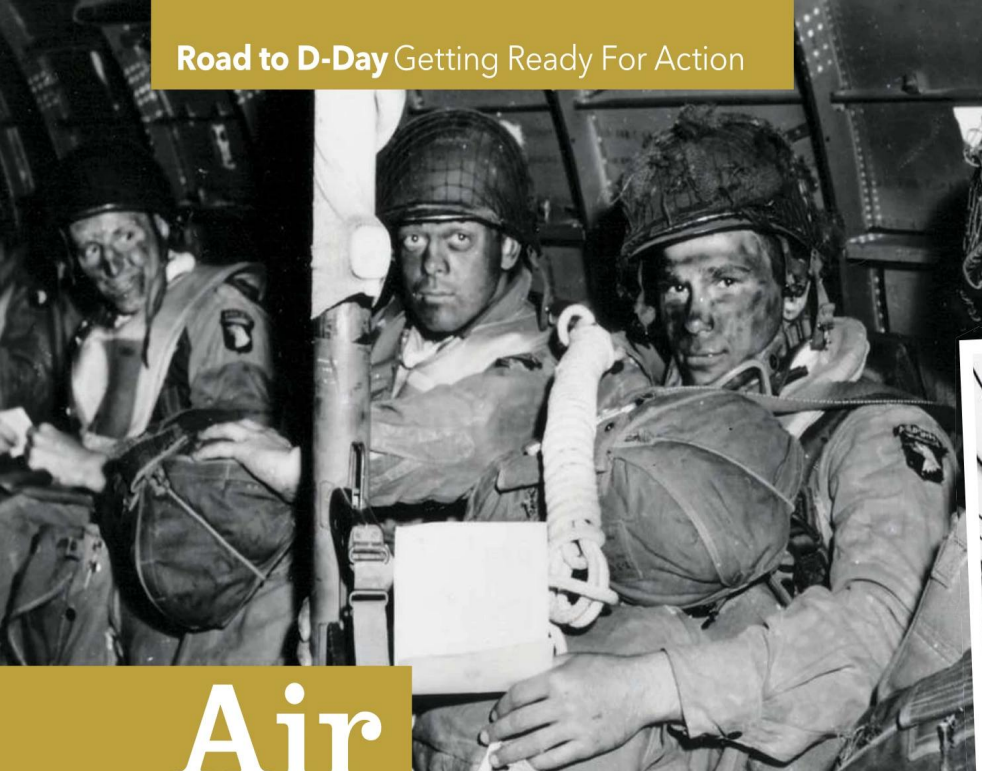
British infantry troops scramble up sand dunes while training for the assault on Gold and Sword beaches



US soldiers come under fire on the beaches of Devon, which briefly served as Normandy's double







LEFT: Airborne troops resolutely await their deployment  
BELOW: A British paratrooper grips the lines of his parachute after a rough landing during training

# Air

If the opening stages of D-Day were to go to plan, those taking to the skies would require a realistic dress rehearsal

Tasked with capturing bridges, coastal routes and key points in Normandy's road network, paratroopers and glider troops would be vital to D-Day's success. As such, their fitness training was rigorous and often gruelling. Lance-Corporal John Ross, who joined the Canadian Parachute Battalion of the British 6th Airborne Division, remembered: "In August and September 1943, we ran five miles every morning and completed a 50-mile march with full gear in 18 hours."

Two US Airborne Divisions, the 82nd and 101st, were also stationed in England. On 11-14 May, their preparations culminated with 'Exercise Eagle', where paratroopers and glider troops descended on Berkshire to take on their

'enemy' - in reality, members of the US 28th Infantry Division. Keen to replicate the impending events as much as possible, they flew out of the airfields they would use for the actual invasion.

Ominously, eight of the nine C-47 aircraft carrying men of the 502nd Parachute Infantry dropped their jumpers nine miles from the intended drop zone, anticipating what would happen on D-Day a month later.

While bombers pounded coastal fortifications and fighters practised air-to-ground attacks, a 33-year-old Californian - Lieutenant-Colonel Joel L Crouch - rehearsed with plane-loads of navigational pathfinders.

Airborne forces had suffered heavily from fratricide over Sicily in July 1943, and Crouch's own aircrew had been responsible for some of the errors. Fine pilots they may have been, but they struggled at flying in formation in poor weather or under fire. To iron out these shortcomings, Crouch ran a Pathfinder School to train the men for their perilous job of being "the spearhead of the spearhead".

In order to transport the two US divisions, 1,116 aircrew were assembled, albeit with only enough trained

navigators for 40 per cent of the fleet. Together, they would tow 1,118 small gliders capable of carrying 13 men (and two pilots) each, as well as 301 larger British-manufactured Horsas.

As Lieutenant Russell Chandler Jr, flying with the 44th Squadron, 316th Troop Carrier Group of the Ninth Air Force, recollected: "We started on daytime jumps, moving on to night-time work, dropping those guys at 600 feet. Once the shroud line was pulled, they were on the ground in seconds. Our biggest fear in training was friendly fire as we had lost many aircraft that way in Sicily, but the one thing we couldn't replicate was the German flak we would receive over Normandy."

It was during this time that Chandler also witnessed an unnerving training accident, which set the men on edge: "The lead aircraft in front of me suddenly climbed up out of formation, for what reason we will never know, and collided with another plane crossing overhead. That aircraft was carrying the commander, the chaplain and other high-ranking officers. We flew directly through the flames and debris, which gave us a horrible foretaste of what the 'Big Day' might be like."



AC-47 - or 'Dakota' - takes flight from an airfield in England

GETTY IMAGES



# Sea

An operation dubbed 'Exercise Tiger' was to be a crucial part of naval preparations – but ended up a costly disaster

Up in Scotland, young American, British and Canadian naval crewmen were taught how to communicate by light and flag, maintain position, turn in formation, and deploy from a column formation into line abreast (side by side).

They also learned the rudiments of small boat handling, seamanship and – vitally important for D-Day – tides and coastal navigation. For, as an admiral pointed out: "If you were in a landing craft looking towards the coast of France, from 10 miles away, with a freeboard [the distance from deck to waterline] of six or seven feet, you just wouldn't see the shore."

On 27-28 April 1944, US troops rehearsed their upcoming assault on Utah beach in a large operation off the coast of Devon named 'Exercise Tiger'. On the second day, however, disaster struck when the ships were attacked by nine Kriegsmarine E-boats. To add to the confusion, many soldiers thought the attack was part of the exercise.

As Lieutenant Eugene E Eckstam, medical officer aboard the tank landing ship LST-507, remembered: "General quarters rudely aroused us about 01:30. I remember hearing gunfire and saying they had better watch where they were shooting or someone would get hurt. Suddenly there was a horrendous noise accompanied by the sound of crunching metal and dust everywhere."

Eckstam's vessel was one of three hit by torpedoes; it lost all power and was dead in the water. He opened a hatch and "... found myself looking into a raging inferno. It was impossible to enter. The screams and cries of those army troops in there still haunt me."

The fire forced those who survived the initial carnage to abandon ship at 02:30, when Eckstam "...watched the most spectacular fireworks ever. Gas cans exploding and the enormous fire blazing only a few yards away are sights forever etched in my memory."

An estimated 946 US servicemen lost their lives in Exercise Tiger. The



Troops board a landing craft in Weymouth, Dorset. Entire areas of coastline were cordoned off for training

disastrous incident was then covered up from fear that it would destroy morale ahead of the pivotal invasion.

When the time came for the final departure, King George VI reviewed the assembled fleets of nearly 7,000 craft in a US patrol boat. "The cook provided His Majesty with coffee," recalled its skipper, Harold B Sherwood. "On leaving, the king complimented our cook on a most excellent cup of coffee. After that, any complaints about his chow were silenced by: 'If it's good enough for the King of England, it's good enough for youse guys.'"

For many of those awaiting the call to action, the impending invasion was hard to process. Seaman Charles 'Buster' Shaeff from Norristown, Pennsylvania, had volunteered for the US Navy at 17. As he left Weymouth, he "...wasn't apprehensive about going in; I was an 18-year-old kid who figured nothing would happen to me. You think - if it happens, it'll happen to someone else." ●

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A Sherman tank, recovered from the sea at Slapton Sands in Devon, commemorates those who died during Exercise Tiger



US soldiers practise coming ashore during a late D-Day rehearsal in May 1944





# HOUR

— BY —

# HOUR

How the dramatic events  
of 6 June 1944 unfolded  
across Normandy





**IN IT TOGETHER**

US troops help fellow soldiers ashore after their landing craft sinks near the beach and they are forced to use a life raft



## D-Day: Hour by Hour

# NIGHT

00:00 – 06:00





Long before the first signs of daylight, the ambitious opening stages of Operation Overlord are underway on both sides of the Channel. As paratroopers drop behind enemy lines in Normandy, thousands of Allied soldiers are departing the shores of southern England, ready to make the fateful crossing...

BY GAVIN MORTIMER

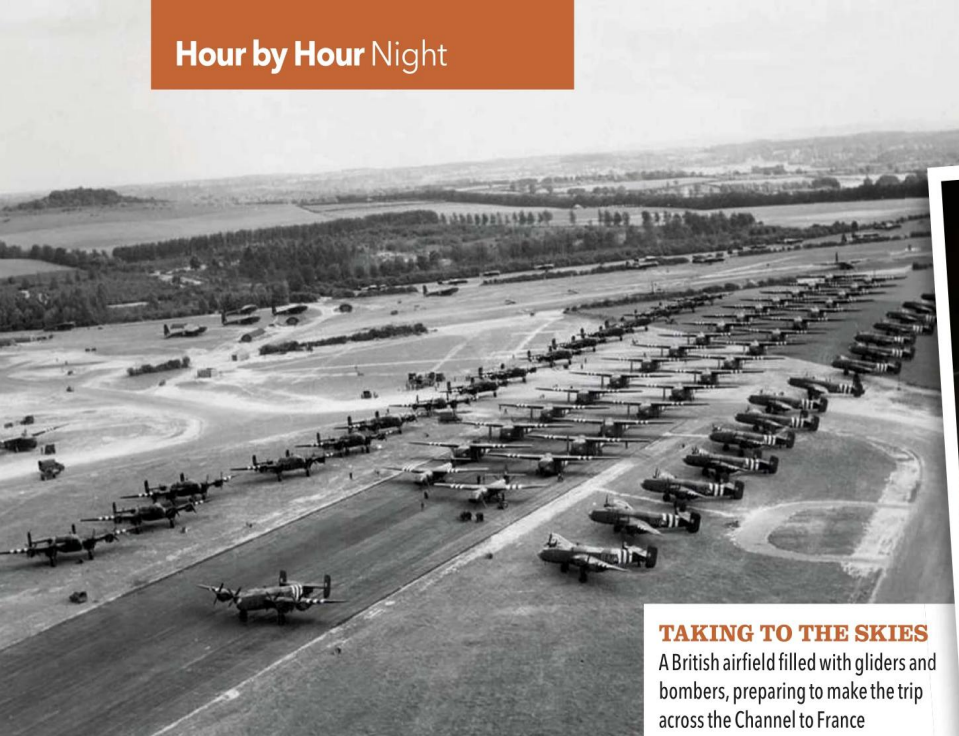
GETTY IMAGES

**TIME TO GO**

British 6th Airborne Division pathfinders synchronise their watches before take-off from RAF Harwell near Oxford







#### TAKING TO THE SKIES

A British airfield filled with gliders and bombers, preparing to make the trip across the Channel to France

**00:15**

Under cover of darkness, US pathfinders parachute into Normandy to identify and light the dropzones for the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions over a 50-mile square area of the Cotentin peninsula. “The morale was wonderful,” remembered pathfinder leader, Captain Frank Lillyman, of the flight over to France. “The men – instead of sitting glumly and thinking whatever men may think going into battle – sang ribald songs all the way across the Channel.”

**00:16**

Britain’s Major John Howard and 180 men of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry land in six Horsa gliders near bridges over the Caen canal and Orne river. Their first task is to seize the bridges (their capture to be indicated with the code words ‘Ham’ and ‘Jam’) and facilitate the eastward push inland for troops landing at Sword beach, as well as prevent German armour from reaching the beachhead from Calais. The objective is achieved within 15 minutes.

**00:20**

Sixty British pathfinders from the 22nd Independent Parachute Company jump over Normandy to mark the three drop zones to be used by the British 6th Airborne Division. They have just 30 minutes to accomplish their task, using beacons and radars.

**00:40**

British SAS officer Norman Poole and five men parachute into Normandy, landing south of the town of Carentan, along with 200 dummy paratroopers, affectionately known as ‘Ruperts’. Their mission, code-named ‘Titanic’, is to divert German troops away from the main American airborne landing site north of Carentan. Firecrackers attached to the three-foot high dummies detonate on impact, and Obergefreiter Rudolf Thiel of the German 6th Parachute Regiment uses his field telephone to inform HQ that “the enemy is attacking”.

**00:50**

Over 4,200 soldiers from the British 6th Airborne Division start jumping over Ranville, Merville, Touffreville and Troarn. Once on the ground their mission is to occupy strategic points and eliminate the Merville battery that overlooks the Anglo-Canadian landing beaches.

**01:11**

Major-General Wilhelm Richter, commander of the German 716th Infantry Division, defending the coast near Caen, telephones General Erich Marcks, and tells him that parachutists have landed east of the Orne river. It is the first official report of the invasion and, as Marcks’ intelligence officer Major Friedrich Hayn would later recall, “struck us like lightning”.



#### CLIMBING ABOARD

A paratrooper, laden with weapons and equipment, steps into his aircraft. Within a few hours of D-Day, thousands of men like him had been dropped into Normandy

**“The morale was wonderful... instead of sitting glumly, the men sang ribald songs all the way across the Channel”**

AKG IMAGES/TOPFOTO



## Julian Rice: THE US AIRMAN WITH A CRUCIAL TASK

Decked in a leather cap and flying goggles, Julian 'Bud' Rice looked every inch the professional airman. This professionalism was just as well, for he had an onerous task in the hours before the D-Day beach landings. Rice was to drop American paratroopers into Sainte-Mère-Église, one of the key places to be captured that night.

More than 800 aircraft were taking part in this paratrooper drop, crossing the Channel in a vast aerial convoy. The planes would be flying so close together that their wingtips were almost touching.

Above the roar of the engines, Rice could hear the words *"Lord keep us safe"* in his headphones. It was some time before he realised it was the sound of his own prayers.

As they flew over the French coastline, the formation entered a dense wall of fog. "Suddenly, without warning, the shit hit the fan," he remembers. When they broke through to the other side, planes were scattered everywhere. Each C-47 was following its own erratic trajectory.

As the planes passed over Sainte-Mère-Église, Rice got his first clear view of the ground. Pathfinder parachutists had set up their T-lights on the designated dropping zones. The men needed to jump – and now – for they were exactly on target.

There was only one way to slow a C-47 in mid-air – by yanking the elevator and wing controls. It was like slamming on the brakes. "Sorry, guys," mouthed Rice to the paratroopers



The C-47 that Julian 'Bud' Rice (inset) flew on D-Day, pictured in 1942

behind. Seconds later, he flicked on the green jump light. They were flying at a height of just 750 feet.

For the 21 paratroopers on board, it was like leaping off the 80th floor of the Empire State Building, a perilous but mercifully short jump, albeit under heavy German gunfire.

For Julian Rice, his nocturnal ordeal was almost over. But for the American paratroopers descending below, it was only just beginning.

WORDS: GILES MILTON

### AWAITING ORDERS

US paratroopers getting ready to jump over England during training in 1942. Their most daring mission would come two years later







#### ON THE GROUND

Paratroopers take part in crucial practice drills. D-Day would test the airborne troops' mettle



#### SELF-PORTRAIT

A British paratrooper during a training exercise, just three months before D-Day. In the darkness of night, accurate navigation proved to be a challenge for many

#### 01:15

The RAF launches operations Glimmer and Taxable by dropping large strips of metal foil into the sea, that – on enemy radar screens – look deceptively like naval convoys. This canny move fools the Germans into believing that the invasion fleet is heading towards Calais, as Hitler has long predicted.

#### 01:15

Elsewhere, the main American airborne assault has begun with 13,000 men of the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions parachuting from 882 planes onto six dropzones at the western end of the Allies' landing area.

The 101st is tasked with seizing four roads between Saint-Martin-de-Varreville and Pouppeville, while the 82nd is to secure strategic crossing points over the Douve and Merderet rivers. Once taken, the objectives are to hold off any German counterattack and allow Allied infantry to establish a beachhead and push inland.

The airborne troops are dropped over a wide area, including Private John Steele,

#### STRAW SOLDIERS

Small dummy paratroopers (known as 'Ruperts' to the British, and 'Oscars' to the Americans) were dropped across Normandy at night in order to confuse the Germans





whose parachute snags on the spire of the church tower in Sainte-Mère-Église, leaving him dangling, terrifyingly exposed. He manages to survive only by playing dead, but those who get tangled in trees are easy prey.

“Enemy soldiers came charging across with fixed bayonets,” remembers Gus Liapes of the 101st, who came down in a field. “I cut and hacked at my harness in a frantic effort to get out of the way. They were almost on top of me when I got my Tommy gun and fired into them.”

**01:30**

Also widely dispersed are the British soldiers of the 9th Parachute Battalion, who dropped 40 minutes earlier. Only 150 out of 600 appear at the rendezvous point a mile east of Merville battery.

**01:50**

As more reports of airborne landings reach the Paris HQ of Admiral Karl Hoffman, Naval West Group chief of operations, he sends a message to Germany: “Report to the headquarters of the führer that it is the invasion.”

TOP PHOTO

**“Enemy soldiers came charging across the field with their fixed bayonets... I cut and hacked at my harness in an effort to get away”**

#### **SWOOPING IN**

Glider troops from the British 6th Airborne Division land near Ranville later on D-Day

**02:00**

Bitter fighting begins on the Cotentin peninsula, but the other adversary that the American paratroopers must overcome is a natural one. As part of their defence system, the Germans have flooded 12 square miles of low-lying land just behind the beaches, meaning that many paratroopers are forced to land in treacherous marshes.

“In the moonlight it looked like a nice smooth meadow to land in, but instead it was a splash,” recalled Leslie Kirk of the 82nd Airborne Division. “I couldn’t get my leg straps unbuckled, so I cut them with my trench knife. The wind was blowing my chute and I took a lot of water before I got myself cut loose.”

Overall, only the 505th Regiment from the 82nd Airborne Division manages to land accurately, and in total, 60 per cent of equipment is lost. As the Americans gather their senses, they start to regroup. They are aided in this by a ‘clicker’ – carried in soldiers’ kit bags and resembling a children’s toy, this small gadget is intended to help identify friends in the darkness. The sound of one ‘click’ (not unlike the noise of a cricket) is to be answered by two clicks.

**02:29**

As 18,000 American and British paratroopers fight to secure the eastern and western flanks of the 50-mile invasion area, the 5,000 vessels of the invasion fleet make their way across the Channel. The USS *Bayfield*, flagship of Rear Admiral Don Moon, drops anchor 12 miles from shore. On board is Major-General Joseph Collins, commander of the Utah beach assault force.

**02:35**

As it becomes increasingly clear that something is afoot, Major-General Max Pemsel, chief of staff of the German Seventh Army, calls Field Marshal Erwin Rommel’s chief of staff, Major-General Dr Hans Speidel, to ask if he knows what is unfolding. To add to the mounting confusion, reports are coming in that “part of the parachute drop consists of straw dummies”.

**02:40**

Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, in command of the German forces in France, evaluates the reports flooding into his HQ, but continues to insist that the real invasion will be hundreds of miles east at the Pas-de-Calais.





## 02:55

Major-General Pemsel calls Speidel to warn that “engine noises are audible from out at sea” and the invasion is underway. Speidel remains skeptical, but the one man whose advice is most required is absent: two days earlier, Rommel had left France for Germany to celebrate his wife’s birthday.

## 03:00

For the past two hours the British 6th Airborne Division has been fighting its way towards its objectives. Of the 640 soldiers of the 7th Battalion, Parachute Regiment, only 210 have met at the rendezvous point, but they now start arriving to reinforce the Caen and Orne bridges. “Where the hell have you been?” Private Harry Clark asks the new arrivals. “Good lads! Well done,” reply the paratroopers.

## 03:00

One of the first German units to engage the American paratroopers is the veteran 6th Fallschirmjäger (paratrooper regiment), under the command of Major Friedrich von der Heydte. Much like their enemy, there is confusion within the German ranks. “The communication situation was anything but clear,” recalled Alfons Mertens. “Partisans and sabotage groups had cut the wire... we couldn’t get any connection to the neighbouring units or senior positions.”

## 03:00

Further confusion is created by the six SAS soldiers who dropped at 00:40 as part of the diversionary Operation Titanic. They detonate 20 bombs south of Carentan.



### FORMIDABLE ENEMY

Field Marshal Erwin Rommel on an inspection tour of his ‘Atlantic Wall’. Although he was tasked with the defence of northern France, Rommel was absent on the day of the invasion

## FRONTLINE STORIES

### Malcolm Brannen: THE PARATROOPER WHO KILLED A GENERAL

Like many American paratroopers dropped into Normandy, Malcolm Brannen had no idea where he had landed. He gathered a group of men who were also lost – 14 in total – and led them to a nearby farmhouse. He wanted to find out where they were.

As Brannen knocked on the door, he heard the distant roar of a car. He knew it probably belonged to a German officer based at the nearby chateau. As it sped towards the farm, his men spread out – weapons loaded – while Brannen himself stood in the road and signalled for the car to stop. To his alarm, the driver slammed his foot on the accelerator.

“All of us fired at the same time. I fell to the road and watched the car as it was hit.” It crashed into the wall next to

the house and the driver “was thrown from the front seat of the car”. Brannen saw him run in the direction of the farmhouse, desperately seeking cover. He took a pot-shot with his Colt automatic, wounding him and enabling him to be captured.

As for the car’s backseat occupant, he was thrown from the vehicle, injured but alive. Brannen watched him crawl across the road in an attempt to reach his Luger, which had been flung from its holster. “As he inched closer to his weapon, he pleaded to me in German, and also in English: ‘Don’t kill, don’t kill!’” Brannen had a moment’s reflection. “I’m not a cold-hearted killer,” he said to himself, “but if he gets that Luger, it’s him or me.”

He pulled the trigger and hit the



Shortly after landing in France, US paratrooper Brannen shot a German who turned out to be a general

German in the forehead, killing him instantly. “The blood spurted from his forehead, about six feet high.”

As they prepared to leave the scene, Brannen found the deceased’s hat: it was printed with the name ‘Falley’. The man had been General Wilhelm Falley, and Brannen had unwittingly claimed the first big scalp of D-Day.

WORDS: GILES MILTON

SHUTTERSTOCK





#### READY TO DEPART

Men packed into Landing Craft Assault (LCA) and Landing Craft Infantry (LCI) vessels in Weymouth, just days before the invasion



#### FINAL HOURS

US troops from E Company, 5th Ranger Battalion, pictured on 4 June 1944. First Sergeant Sandy Martin (far left), was later killed on Omaha beach

**Ten miles off the Normandy coast, US troops destined for Omaha beach began transferring into their landing craft**

#### 03:00

The RAF bombs Caen, 10 miles inland from the landing beaches. It is a strategically important city for the Germans, sitting astride the Orne river and Caen canal at the junction of several roads and railways that service Paris and other French regions.

#### 03:25

Lieutenant-Colonel Terence Otway, in command of the 9th Battalion, Parachute Regiment, has gathered only 150 British paratroopers out of 635 and is forced to revise his plan for destroying the coastal battery at Merville. The battery, surrounded by a minefield and a 15ft-thick and 5ft-high barbed wire fence, is believed to carry four guns that have the potential to inflict heavy casualties on Sword beach.

#### 03:30

Ten miles off the Normandy coast, the American troops planning to come ashore at Utah and Omaha beaches begin transferring into Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel (LCVP) from their troopships. Designed by American engineer Andrew Higgins, the flat-bottomed barges are capable of transporting 36 equipped soldiers at a rate of 12 knots.





### AIR AND SEA

C-47 planes tow gliders filled with Allied troops above the English Channel, where naval units are also faintly visible



**03:35**

Sixty-nine Horsa gliders arrive near Ranville to reinforce the British 6th Airborne Division. Part of a series of landings code-named 'Tonga', the operation goes smoothly and most aircraft come down in the correct landing strip. Soldiers in a glider piloted by John Hutley even have time for a quick cup of tea.

**04:00**

At his Alpine retreat near Berchtesgaden, Bavaria, Adolf Hitler goes to bed with the help of a sleeping pill and leaves instructions not to be woken before 09:00.

**Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Krause had an American flag, which he ran up the flagpole above the town hall**

**04:00**

The 3rd Battalion of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, overcomes German resistance and soon captures Sainte-Mère-Église, making it the first town to be liberated on D-Day. Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Krause has with him an American flag – the same one raised over Naples the previous October – which he runs up the flagpole of the town hall.

**04:00**

Dozens of American gliders descend over the Cotentin peninsula as part of operations Chicago and Detroit. Chicago comprises 52 CG-4 Waco gliders containing anti-tank guns and support troops for the 101st Airborne Division, while the 50 gliders of Detroit are destined for the 82nd.

Despite the presence of anti-glider defences embedded in the soil – tall posts dubbed 'Rommel's Asparagus' – 92 per cent of Chicago's gliders land within two miles of the target, but cloud cover reduces the figure to 62 per cent for Detroit. Eight soldiers are killed in total, including Brigadier-General Don Pratt, assistant division commander of the 101st Airborne Division. He is the first Allied general officer to die on D-Day.

**04:30**

Three miles off the coast of Utah beach, two rubber rafts containing men from the US 4th Cavalry Group approach the Saint-Marcouf Islands. The men swim the last 100 metres and become the first Allied soldiers to invade France by sea. The islands are mined but uninhabited.

**04:40**

Field Marshal von Rundstedt seeks permission from Colonel-General Alfred Jodl, chief of operations, to move Panzer divisions lying in reserve near Paris, to Normandy. However, Jodl is still asleep at his HQ near Hitler's mountain retreat and his staff decide not to wake him.

**04:45**

Two British midget submarines, X-20 and X-23, surface near the Normandy coastline. Located 20 miles apart from each other, their task is to mark the limits of the Anglo-Canadian landing for the invasion fleet using strobe lights and underwater sonar devices.





GETTY IMAGES

#### OVER THE PENINSULA

Empty gliders sit in fields and C-47s head back to Britain in a photo taken near Sainte-Mère-Église later in the campaign



**“It was as though you could feel the whole ground shaking towards the coast”**

**MOMENTS AWAY**

As their landing craft nears the shore, US troops get ready to tackle the deadly obstacles on Omaha beach

**04:45**

Lieutenant-Colonel Otway fires a yellow flare to signal to the Royal Navy that the Merville battery has been captured. The mission has seen ferocious fighting, and 70 out of 150 men of the British 9th Parachute Battalion have been killed in the process.

“Booby traps and mines were going off all over the place, fierce hand-to-hand fighting was going on inside the battery, and I had to keep dodging a machine gun in the tower which was shooting at me,” recalled Otway.

**05:00**

The RAF carries out a raid on German coastal defences in which 1,136 aircraft drop 6,000 tons of bombs.

**05:07**

The 55ft midget submarine X-23 is in position opposite Ouistreham and an 18ft-mast with strobe lights facing seawards has been erected. But a rough swell with two-metre waves and a lively wind prevents Sub-Lieutenant Jim Booth taking to his dinghy to erect a second set of lights in the sea.





**05:30**

The British battleships *Warspite* and *Ramillies* begin the Allied naval bombardment, opening up the coastal defences with their 15-inch guns. "It was as though you could feel the whole ground shaking towards the coast," recalled Major John Howard, who could hear the commotion from the captured bridges by the Orne river and Caen canal.

**05:30**

British soldiers who will form the first wave on Sword beach begin to board their landing craft.

**05:30**

German E-boat commander Heinrich Hoffmann has been racing across the Channel at a rate of 23 knots from his base at Le Havre after receiving word of

a large naval force approaching France. The three torpedo boats emerge through a fog (actually the Allied smokescreen) and run into the invasion fleet. Hoffmann attacks and 18 torpedoes are fired, one of which sinks the *Svenner*, a Norwegian destroyer fighting on the Allied side.

**05:37**

The German battery perched on the cliffs at Longues-sur-Mer opens fire but its ten shells fail to hit the USS *Emmons*.

**05:50**

The US naval bombardment begins with the battleships *Texas* and *Arkansas* pounding German batteries overlooking Omaha beach. In total there are eight concrete bunkers with guns of 75mm or larger, as well as 35 pillboxes, four artillery batteries and 18 anti-tank guns. Ten miles away off Utah beach, three

cruisers and the battleship *Nevada* bombard German positions.

**05:50**

Bombers of the US Ninth Air Force begin dropping 4,400 250lb bombs on German coastal positions, while 480 B-24 bombers drop 1,285 tons of bombs between Port-en-Bessin and Pointe de la Percée in the Omaha beach sector.

**05:58**

Dawn breaks. In a German bunker overlooking Omaha beach, Major Werner Pluskat is cold, tired and confused. There have been reports of large-scale airborne landings inland, but his sector has been quiet. He scans the sea with his binoculars, and freezes. Through the grey light he sees them. "It's the invasion," he tells his men in the bunker. "There must be 10,000 ships out there." ●

## FRONTLINE STORIES

### Howard Vander Beek: A LEADER OF THE SEABORNE INVASION

Howard Vander Beek had a momentous task on D-Day: as commander of a specialist control vessel, he was to lead the huge armada of ships destined for Utah beach. Force U consisted of 865 vessels, including battleships, destroyers and frigates.

Sailing in the vanguard was not his only task that day. Once the fleet had arrived off-shore, he was to guide the smaller landing craft to the beach, leading them to the exact spot where the men would begin their invasion. If they landed at the wrong place, their long months of training would have all been in vain.

Thankfully the Channel crossing went to plan, but now the 27-year-old Vander Beek had to lead the men to the shore. Lined up behind his control craft

were the first 10 landing craft packed with the men of E Company and F Company. Further away were another 10 craft with the men of B Company and C Company. And then came the larger craft carrying the amphibious tanks, along with hundreds of other vessels laden with jeeps, armoured vehicles and 21,000 infantry troops.

Vander Beek guided the giant flotilla to within 500 yards of the coast. As the troops prepared to land, he felt desperately sorry for them. "Some were too busy using helmets to bail out seawater seeping over their low-set craft." Others, suffering from acute seasickness, were vomiting over the sides. "Most, however, stood pressed together, motionless, salt-water soaked and chilled by fear and cold."



Howard Vander Beek was responsible for leading a large flotilla of ships towards Utah beach

What Vander Beek did not realise was that his control vessel had been driven off course by the violent wind and tide. He was actually putting them ashore a mile to the south of their intended landing.

In the event, this navigational error was to prove a blessing in disguise. Vander Beek inadvertently brought them ashore at a spot where there were few German guns. In doing so, he saved hundreds of lives.

WORDS: GILES MILTON



D-Day: Hour by Hour

# MORNING

06:00 – 12:00





As dawn breaks, the first waves of Allied troops emerge from their landing craft and onto the five beaches earmarked for the seaborne invasion. Although the sight of the armada takes the German ranks by surprise, progressing past the mines and machine gun fire will not come without heavy losses...

BY GAVIN MORTIMER

GETTY IMAGES

**WAVE UPON WAVE**

US troops wade towards Omaha beach in this iconic photograph taken by Robert F Sargent



### 06:00

Exactly 30 minutes before 'H-Hour' (the time when the assaults on Omaha and Utah beaches are scheduled to start), Allied rocket launcher barges begin saturating the landing zones. They launch 18,000 rocket salvos in the American sector and 20,000 in the three Anglo-Canadian beaches of Gold, Sword and Juno. The beaches are named after goldfish, swordfish and jellyfish, although Churchill earlier changed 'Jelly' to 'Juno', deeming the former to be completely inappropriate for an operation "in which a very large number of men could lose their lives".

### 06:00

Major Friedrich von der Heydte, commanding the 6th Fallschirmjäger, begins interrogating captured American paratroopers at his HQ in Carentan and concludes that the invasion is underway.

### 06:15

The American invasion force is only a mile off the coast, but rough seas are sinking some of the landing craft. Ten go down off Omaha and seven founder on the approach to Utah.

### 06:30

Colonel-General Alfred Jodl wakes up. After a breakfast of egg and toast, he decides to deny Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt's request to move the Panzer reserves to Normandy until Hitler wakes at 09:00. On hearing the news, Von Rundstedt is "fuming with rage, red in the face, and his anger makes his speech unintelligible".

### 06:30

The 34,000 men and 3,300 vehicles of the 1st and 29th US Infantry Divisions begin coming ashore over a four-mile front at Omaha, while the 23,000 men of the 4th Division land at Utah. At the former, 27 of the 29 amphibious tanks (modified Sherman tanks with floats attached) from the 741st Tank Battalion founder, leaving the 1st Division brutally exposed to the murderous German fire.

Stationed in one German pillbox is 20-year-old Heinrich Severloh – who will soon play a deadly role – along with 29 other men. The officer in charge, Lieutenant Bernhard Frerking, instructs his soldiers: "You must open fire when the enemy is knee-deep in the water and is still unable to run quickly."

### 06:30

Through waves that are five feet high, the first assault comes ashore at Omaha, where they are confronted by mines, barbed wire and steel and concrete obstacles in the surf. The German defences here are strongest, guarding the two principal exits leading off the beach at Vierville-sur-Mer and further east towards Colleville-sur-Mer.

One company from the 116th Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, loses 65 per cent of its strength within just 10 minutes. The US War Department's Historical Division will later state: "As the first men jumped, they crumpled and flopped into the water. Then order was lost. It seemed to the men that the only way to get ashore was to dive in head first and swim clear of the fire that was striking the boats."

### FINAL PREPARATIONS

A landing craft packed with US troops ahead of the invasion. Some sources suggest this particular photograph was taken off the coast of Dorset on 4 June



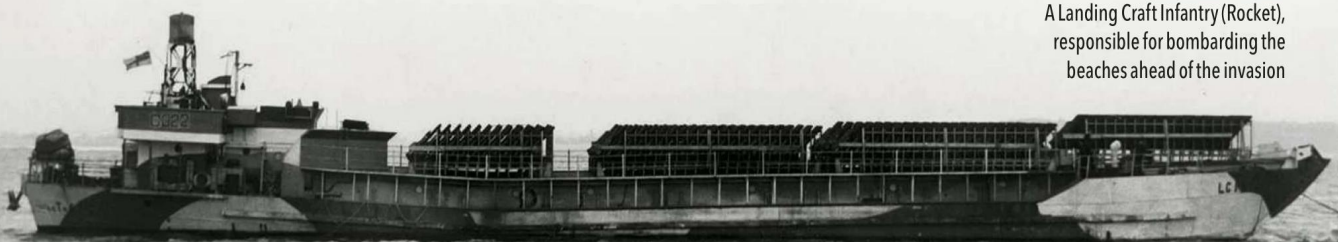
### ATLANTIC WALL

The Germans' array of coastal defences would prove difficult to penetrate



### FATAL FIRE

A Landing Craft Infantry (Rocket), responsible for bombarding the beaches ahead of the invasion







#### TEMPERS FLARE

Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt (above) was “fuming with rage” after his request to move Panzer reserves to Normandy was initially denied

## FRONTLINE STORIES

### Leonard Schroeder: THE FIRST SOLDIER ON UTAH BEACH

Leonard Schroeder was a bulldozer of a man with a thick-set face and a pronounced nose. He was known as ‘Moose’, a no-nonsense team player with big hands and a big heart. He had pushed his men hard, leading them through countless mock landings. Now, he was tasked with leading them ashore in the first wave on Utah beach.

“Well, Moose, this is it. Give ‘em hell!” said his battalion commander. But for all the fighting talk, the two men “choked up” as emotion got the better of them. Schroeder’s landing craft led from the front, all the way to the shore. The underside of the craft crunched to a halt in the shingle.

“For God’s sake, get off!” shouted Schroeder, as he jumped into the waist-deep water. He was followed by

his men, who surged through the waves, dodging mines and barbed wire. Schroeder’s sights were fixed on the low sea wall up ahead, which offered some sort of shelter.

A few more paces and Schroeder was on the beach. He had just made history. He was the first Allied soldier to land from the sea on D-Day.

He now led his lads in a spirited dash across 400 yards of sand. It was not easy, for their clothes were soaked and their waterlogged baggage acted like a dragnet. They eventually reached the sea wall, where they had a refuge of sorts. In a matter of minutes, Schroeder’s 150 men of F Company were ashore with only a few men down.

Schroeder once again took the initiative, leading his men on a



belly-crawl across the dunes in order to attack their first German stronghold. When he looked back towards the sea, the sight was astonishing. Scores of landing craft had already beached and hundreds more were approaching the shore. It was clear that Utah beach would soon be in American hands.

WORDS: GILES MILTON



### 06:36

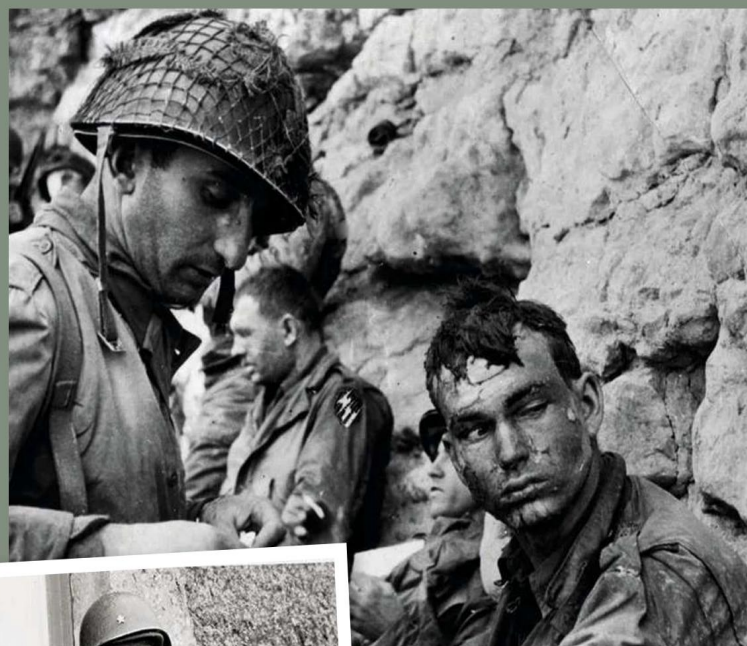
The 32 amphibious tanks of the 743rd Tank Battalion land on Omaha beach and begin to lay down much-needed support as the second assault wave of the 29th Division wades ashore.

### 06:41

The USS *Corry* is hit in its engineering spaces while supporting the landings at Utah – the most westerly of the five beaches. The destroyer sinks rapidly, with the loss of 24 lives.

### 06:45

Elsewhere on Utah, 28 of the 70th Tank Battalion amphibious tanks are now ashore. Among the first wave of soldiers to land is Brigadier-General Theodore Roosevelt Jr, the 56-year-old assistant commander of the 4th Division and son of the 26th US president. Despite needing to use a cane and suffering from a heart condition, Roosevelt doggedly petitions to go ashore with his men, writing: “I personally know both officers and men of these advance units and believe that it will steady them to know that I am with them.”



#### FIRST AID

A wounded US infantryman receives medical attention after storming Omaha beach with his comrades

#### LEADING THE ASSAULT

Brigadier-General Theodore Roosevelt Jr, son of the 26th US president, led the first wave of troops on to Utah beach. He died of a heart attack a month later while campaigning in Normandy

BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES

### 06:58

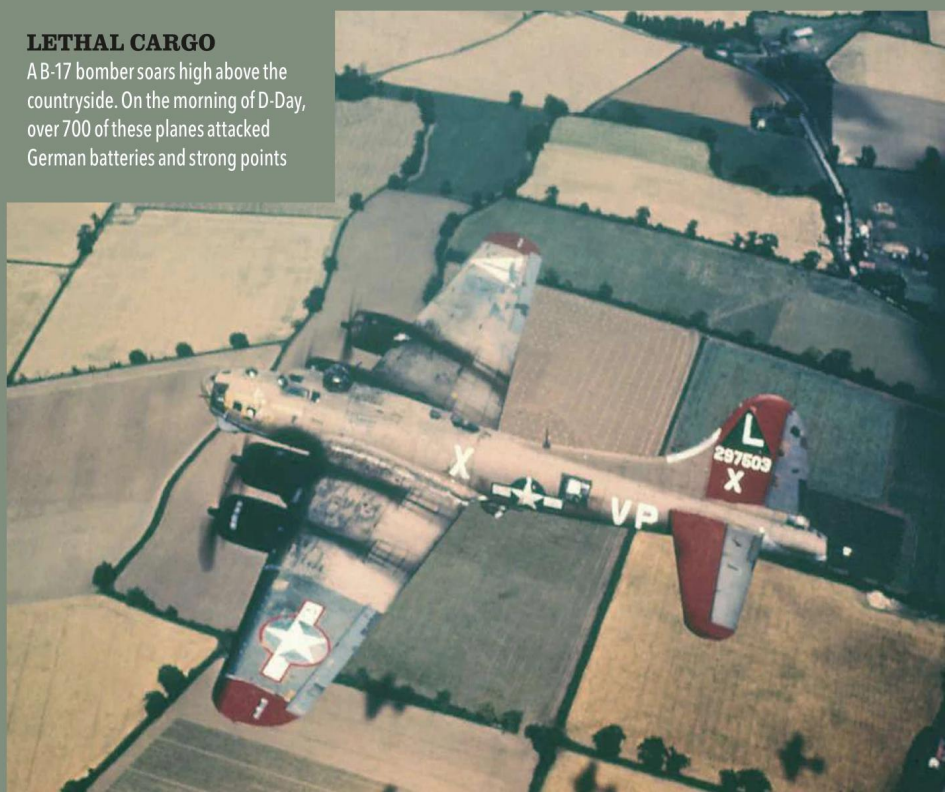
Thirty minutes before H-Hour arrives on the Anglo-Canadian beaches, over 700 B-17 bombers of the 1st and 3rd US Bombardment Divisions attack German coastal batteries and strong points from Longues-sur-Mer to Ouistreham, located on the easternmost flank of the Allied landing zone.

### 07:00

The second assault wave lands on Omaha beach amid a scene of utter devastation and chaos. Among them is medical orderly Alfred Eigenberg, who encounters so many wounded he doesn't “know where to start or with whom”.

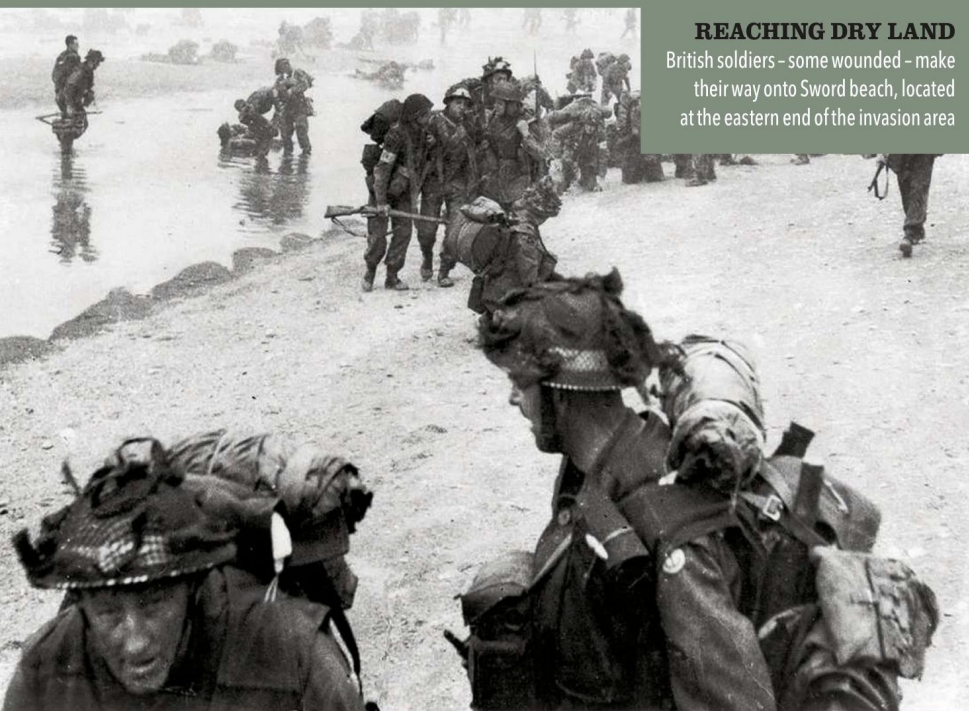
#### LETHAL CARGO

A B-17 bomber soars high above the countryside. On the morning of D-Day, over 700 of these planes attacked German batteries and strong points





## Medical orderly Alfred Eigenberg encountered so many wounded he didn't know where to start



### REACHING DRY LAND

British soldiers - some wounded - make their way onto Sword beach, located at the eastern end of the invasion area

**07:10**

One of the two amphibious tanks of the 741st Tank Battalion that hasn't foundered reaches the beach at Omaha. It knocks out the 88mm gun of blockhouse WN-61 ('WN' being an abbreviation of the German *Widerstandsnest*, or 'resistance point').

**07:10**

At Pointe du Hoc, situated between the beaches at Omaha and Utah, Colonel James Ruder leads his 225 men up the eastern face of the 100ft cliff. They are 40 minutes behind schedule because of a navigational error from their landing crafts, but once they have reached their objective they discover that the 155mm gun battery they were intending to take out is already empty.

**07:25**

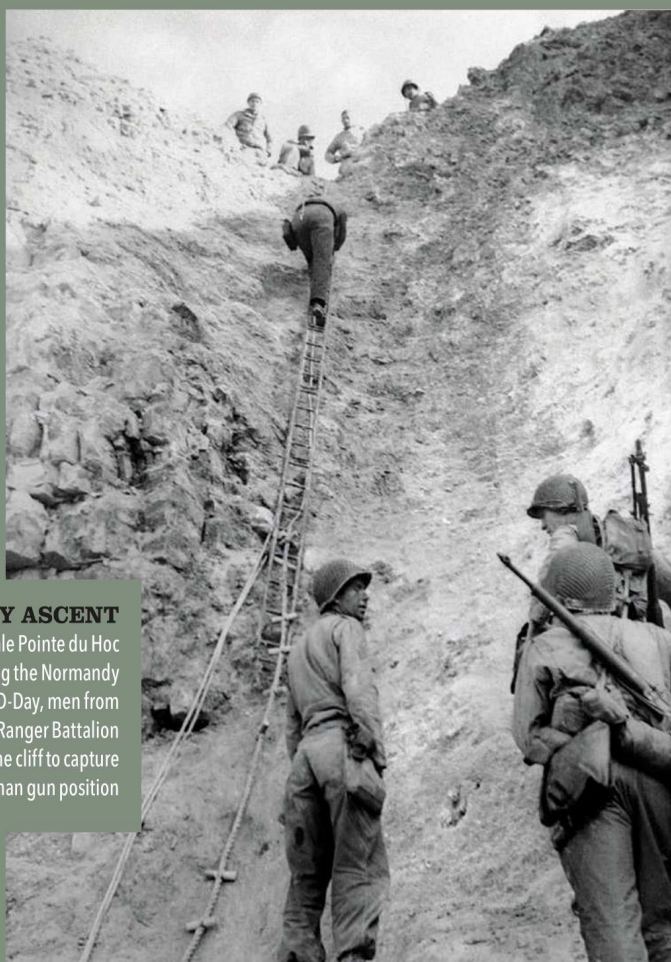
H-Hour arrives on Sword beach and the 3rd British Infantry Division, led by General Tom Rennie, lands on time. Rennie's orders are to seize the right bank of the Orne river and liaise with the 6th Airborne and the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division in order to take Caen and the Carpiquet aerodrome by dusk.

**07:25**

In the vanguard of the 1st Special Service Brigade landing on Sword beach are the 177 French soldiers of Commando Group Kieffer (named after their commander, Philippe Kieffer). Their immediate task is to eliminate the string of German bunkers among the dunes.

**07:25**

H-Hour arrives on Gold beach as the 50th British Division, led by Major-General Douglas Graham, lands on a three-mile stretch of coastline between Arromanches and Ver-sur-Mer.



### RISKY ASCENT

Soldiers scale Pointe du Hoc later during the Normandy campaign. On D-Day, men from the 2nd Ranger Battalion climbed the cliff to capture a German gun position

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES







A frogman (right) wears apparatus used by the likes of Wally Blanchard, who cleared underwater obstacles for troops arriving on Gold beach (left)

## Wally Blanchard: A DARING BRITISH FROGMAN

The temperature of the sea was hovering at around 12°C when a chirpy young Londoner named Wally Blanchard slipped into the waters at Gold beach. He was wearing a thick Kapok vest to aid buoyancy, but this did little to cut the chill. The next few hours were going to test his stamina and resilience as he undertook an extraordinary undercover operation.

Blanchard was a specialist naval frogman whose role was to defuse or blow up the underwater minefield that lay offshore from Gold. It was an unenviable task. Defusing a mine was already hard enough on land, but far more hazardous when done underwater, where the unpredictable current could hurl a diver against the very objects he was trying to destroy.

Blanchard set to work, swimming from obstacle to obstacle and laying white tape and marker buoys to mark a passage to the shore. His fellow frogmen were marking other passages. They then strapped explosive charges to each of the obstacles to be destroyed. Not until the aerial bombardment began did they detonate the explosives, clearing a safe run-in for the landing craft. They succeeded in blowing a large number of mines, reducing risks for the landing craft and saving many lives in the process.

When Blanchard glanced out to sea at dawn, he saw a sight to gladden the heart. Hundreds of landing craft were heading for the shore over a wide area. As they approached, the infantrymen spotted Blanchard and his fellow frogmen in their skin-tight outfits. It was the cue for some good-natured taunts. "Where did you ballet dancers come from?" they shouted.

One of the landing craft picked up Wally Blanchard and his fellow frogmen as it made its return journey to the offshore fleet. They thought their day's work was done, but their coxswain now issued them with new orders. The Americans, he said, were being massacred on Omaha beach. Their help was urgently required if Omaha was to be saved from disaster.

WORDS: GILES MILTON

## FIGHTER ACE

Renowned German Luftwaffe pilot Josef Priller (below) took off from Lille and attacked British forces making their way onto Sword beach

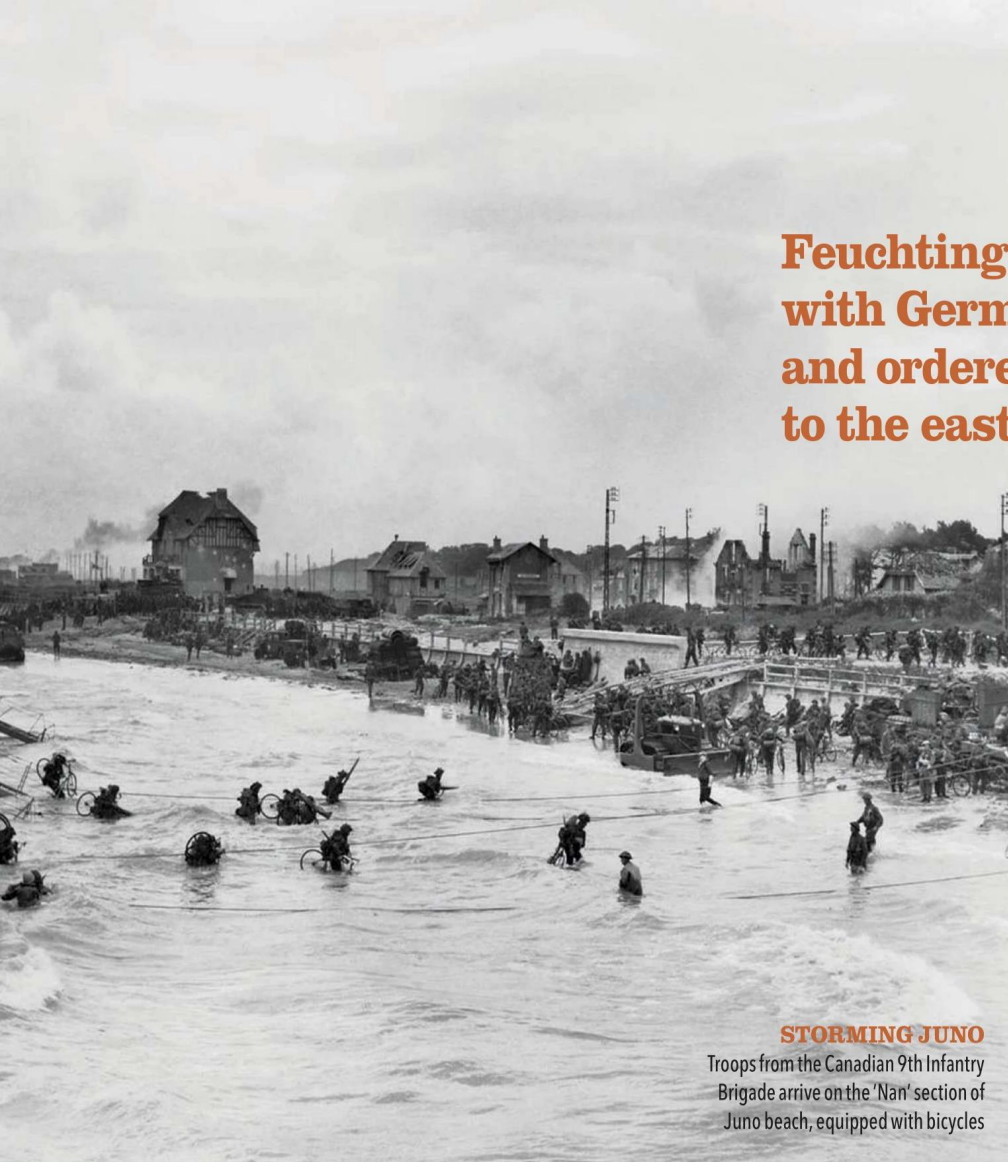


## WATCHING THE SKIES

In a posed propaganda shot, Allied troops man anti-aircraft guns just a short distance from Juno beach







## Feuchtinger lost patience with German high command and ordered troops to head to the eastern beaches

### STORMING JUNO

Troops from the Canadian 9th Infantry Brigade arrive on the 'Nan' section of Juno beach, equipped with bicycles

#### 07:35

The 3rd Canadian Infantry Division is running 10 minutes behind schedule on the approach to the five miles of beach at Juno. Its 366-strong invasion fleet is being buffeted by strong seas.

#### 07:35

Progress continues to go well on Utah, with paratroopers of the 3rd Battalion of the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment capturing exit number 3 to the west of the beach near Audouville-la-Hubert. Later, it will be discovered that Utah was lightly defended in comparison to Omaha because the Germans assumed their flooding of low-lying areas behind the beach would deter any Allied landings.

IWM (B 5245)/IWM (A 30323)/ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

#### 07:40

Lieutenant-General Edgar Feuchtinger loses patience with the indecision of the German high command and orders the 16,242 seasoned troops of his 21st Panzer Division to head to the eastern beaches. He is finally able to act on his earlier intention to “clean out the area between Caen and the coast”.

#### 07:45

The first wave of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division under General Rodney Keller lands at Juno. But the delay means they come ashore at a higher tide when the mines and beach obstacles are less visible. Landing crafts are driven onto the obstacles and seven of their 29 amphibious tanks sink. Only 14 per cent of bunkers guarding Juno have been destroyed during the earlier bombardment and the casualties are particularly heavy.

“We had to go at least 50 yards before we got out of the sea,” recalled Lockie

Fulton, commanding a company of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles. “We simply struggled through it. You’d see a guy fall next to you. You couldn’t help him, but you’d try to drag him along anyway. It was something to see those bullets skipping at you like stones across the water. I thought if I jumped high enough, I might not get hit.”

#### 08:00

Two RAF Spitfires fly low over the two bridges across the Caen canal and Orne river, and Major John Howard signals that they are in British hands. One of the pilots drops an item from his cockpit – the early editions of the day’s newspapers.

#### 08:00

Two Luftwaffe pilots, fighter aces Josef Priller and Heinz Wodarczyk, take off from Lille and attack the British forces landing down below on Sword beach. It is one of the few sorties flown by the Luftwaffe on a day when Allied aerial supremacy is dominant.

#### 08:00

Bitter fighting still rages on Omaha and now the men on the beach have a new foe – the rising tide. Reinforcements are forced to advance up the beach under heavy fire while some badly wounded men are drowned by the incoming sea. Destroyers and rocket launcher barges bombard the German blockhouses.





### 08:10

The Canadian 8th Brigade come ashore in the third wave at Juno, but progress is held up by a 50mm gun that knocks out four Sherman tanks.

### 08:15

German resistance is no more on Sword beach and one British artillery captain encounters “four Germans with their suitcases packed, who appeared to be awaiting the first available transportation out of France”. As the British infantry and armour push inland, Commando units on the eastern flank head towards the Orne. Back on the beach, some of the 630 casualties are treated.

### 08:15

The American 1st Battalion of the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment attacks the Saint-Martin-de-Varreville battery. Patrols begin to advance beyond the dunes to join forces with elements of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions.

### 08:30

The landing on Omaha is briefly put on hold because of congestion caused by bodies and stuck vehicles. The Germans believe victory is within their grasp and the 915th Grenadier Regiment launches an attack to retake blockhouse WN-60. But the American forces have no intention of quitting and they take blockhouse WN-62 and attack WN-61.

Among the four Americans to later be awarded the Medal of Honor for their efforts on 6 June is Lieutenant Jimmie W Monteith, killed while leading the assault on WN-61. The citation will describe how “without regard for his own personal safety, he continually moved up and down the beach reorganising men for further assault”.

### 08:30

On the ‘Dog White’ sector of Omaha, General Norman Cota has come ashore with the 116th Infantry Regiment, part of the 29th Division, and establishes his command post on the beach. The previous day he had forewarned his

officers of a bloody landing, but said: “We must improvise, carry on, not lose our heads.” He proves true to his word and starts to rally the men around him.

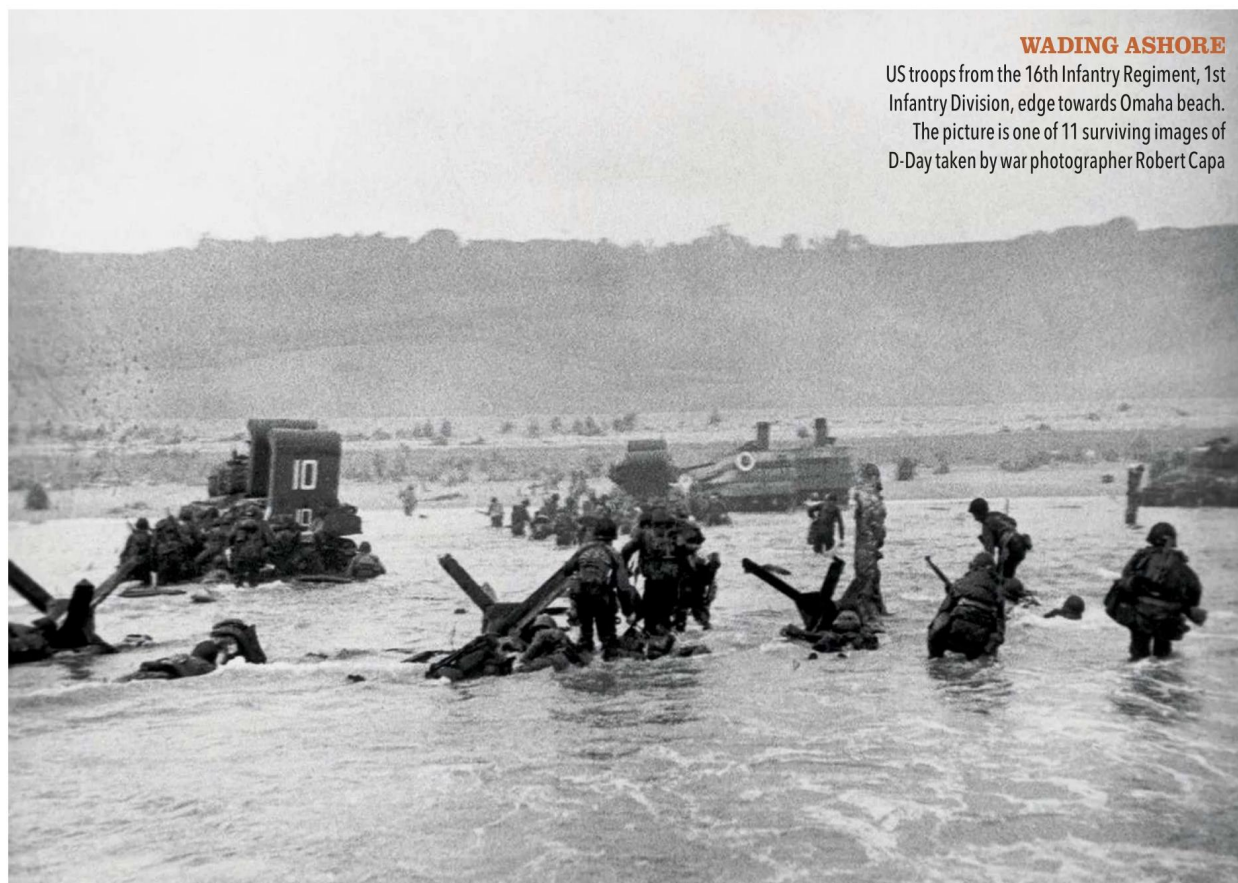
Also ashore is the acclaimed photographer Robert Capa, who lands as part of the second wave with the 16th Regiment of the 1st US Infantry Division. He shoots 106 pictures, and although only 11 will survive, they become the defining images of the landings.

### 08:55

Blockhouse WN-61 at Omaha is now in American hands and 31 German soldiers are taken prisoner.

### 09:00

At Pointe du Hoc, a two-man Ranger patrol discovers five of the six missing 155mm guns from the battery, camouflaged 250 yards south of the coastal highway. They destroy the guns using thermite grenades.



#### WADING ASHORE

US troops from the 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, edge towards Omaha beach.

The picture is one of 11 surviving images of D-Day taken by war photographer Robert Capa

MAGNUM PHOTOS-ROBERT CAPA © INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES





Soldiers land on the 'Easy Red' section of Omaha beach, where Jack Ellery was met with direct fire

## Jack Ellery: HERO OF OMAHA

Jack Ellery looked younger than his 24 years, a fresh-faced marine cadet with pudgy cheeks and winsome smile. A sergeant with the 116th Infantry, his task that morning was to land on the 'Easy Red' section of Omaha and capture the track that led to the village of Saint-Laurent. He was confident that his men would succeed.

*"Get off the beach!"* – The same urgent cry could be heard up and down the shoreline. Ellery was desperate to do just that, for he had landed in hell, with "direct fire, plunging and grazing and flanking fire". He was half aware of men falling around him but his entire focus was on forcing himself through the choking haze of "sweat, smoke, dust and mist". A nearby German stronghold, WN-62, was pouring bullets into his comrades.

Ellery paused for a moment when he reached the sea wall before gathering five of his men and leading them up the bluff. It was an extraordinary display of courage.

"About half to two-thirds of the way up, a machine gun opened up on us." Ellery scratched his way forward until he was extremely close to the gun.

He unloaded four of his fragmentation grenades and hurled them into the machine-gun nest. All four exploded, devastatingly, enabling him to continue his dash up the bluff. "Those other kids were right behind me."

As he clambered ever higher – and saw others doing the same – he was struck by a thought that would remain with him for years. Of the generals and colonels who would later claim to have stormed Omaha beach, Jack Ellery saw not a single one.

"When you talk about combat leadership under fire on the beach at Normandy," he said, "I don't see how the credit can go to anyone other than the company grade officers and senior non-commissioned officers."

It was men like Jack Ellery who secured victory on Omaha that day.

WORDS: GILES MILTON



Capa took 106 pictures, most of which were lost

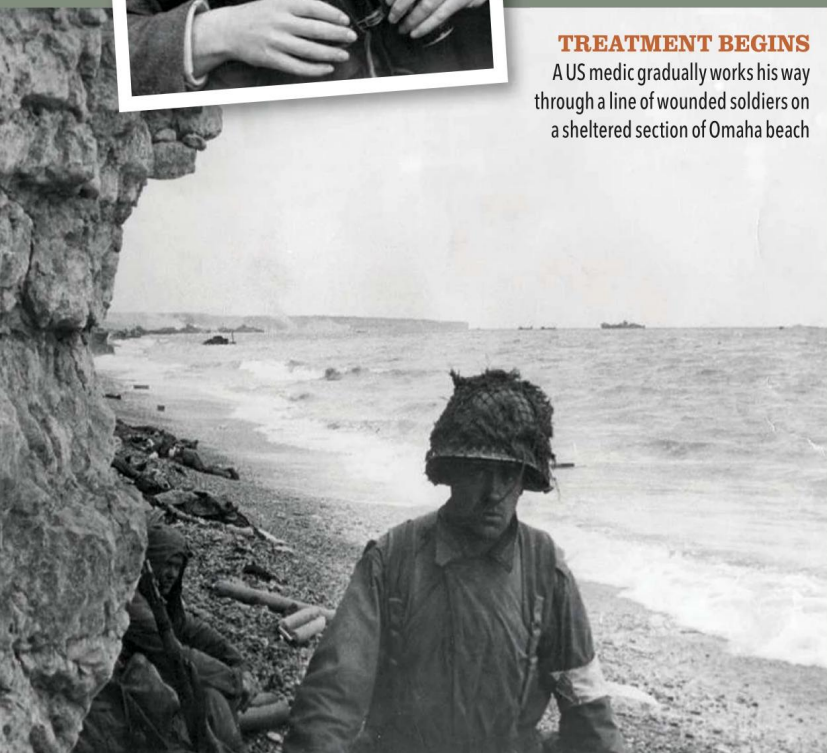


### CRAWLING TO OMAHA

A photograph taken by Robert Capa shows an American GI making his way through the surf. A number of injured troops on Omaha beach drowned when the tide came in

### TREATMENT BEGINS

A US medic gradually works his way through a line of wounded soldiers on a sheltered section of Omaha beach





**09:05**

Adolf Hitler is finally awake and receives a briefing by aides about the events in Normandy. His initial reaction is one of excitement, declaring the landings to be diversionary operations ahead of the main landing in the Pas-de-Calais – as he has always maintained. But his mood changes during a conference with Jodl and Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel as he begins to learn more about the Allied assault. “Well, is it or isn’t it the invasion?” he demands to know.

**09:10**

The situation is still desperate on Omaha as the tide rapidly rises and obstacles hinder movement up the beach. Nevertheless, the soldiers who have managed to make it ashore are starting to suppress the resistance. At 09:15, the 352nd German Infantry Division reports the loss of strongpoints WN-65, WN-68 and WN-70.

**09:15**

A German gunboat approaching Bénouville bridge (now known as ‘Pegasus bridge’) from Ouistreham is knocked out by British airborne troops, and the crew captured. The young skipper, a fervent Nazi, screams at the amused British and says that when the führer hears about it they will be “driven back into the sea”.

**09:17**

From his HQ at Southwick House in Hampshire, General Dwight D Eisenhower – commander of Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) – issues Communiqué No 1, which states that: “Allied naval forces, supported by strong air forces, began landing Allied armies this morning on the northern coast of France.”

In the operations centre of the country mansion, Eisenhower studies the huge map on the wall that is updated every few

minutes with reports from the landing zones. Two miles away at Broomfield House, General Bernard Montgomery, in command of Allied ground forces, is pacing the garden of his HQ.

**09:30**

On Omaha, Captain Joe Dawson, commanding G Company of the 2nd Battalion, 16th US Infantry Regiment, has succeeded in blowing gaps in the German wire with Bangalore torpedoes. “I saw what was ahead,” recalled Dawson. “From the beach flat to the top of the bluffs was little over 250 feet, and it was almost sheer.”

The path goes all the way to the top of the bluffs: Dawson knows he has discovered the escape route off Omaha beach, and tells one of his men to go back and get the rest of the company. Dawson then spots a German machine gun nest situated on the bluffs and he crawls 75 yards before knocking it out with a grenade. He leads his men up the bluffs and inland towards the village of Colleville-sur-Mer, located one mile south of the beach.

GETTY IMAGES/IWM (5092)/US ARMY

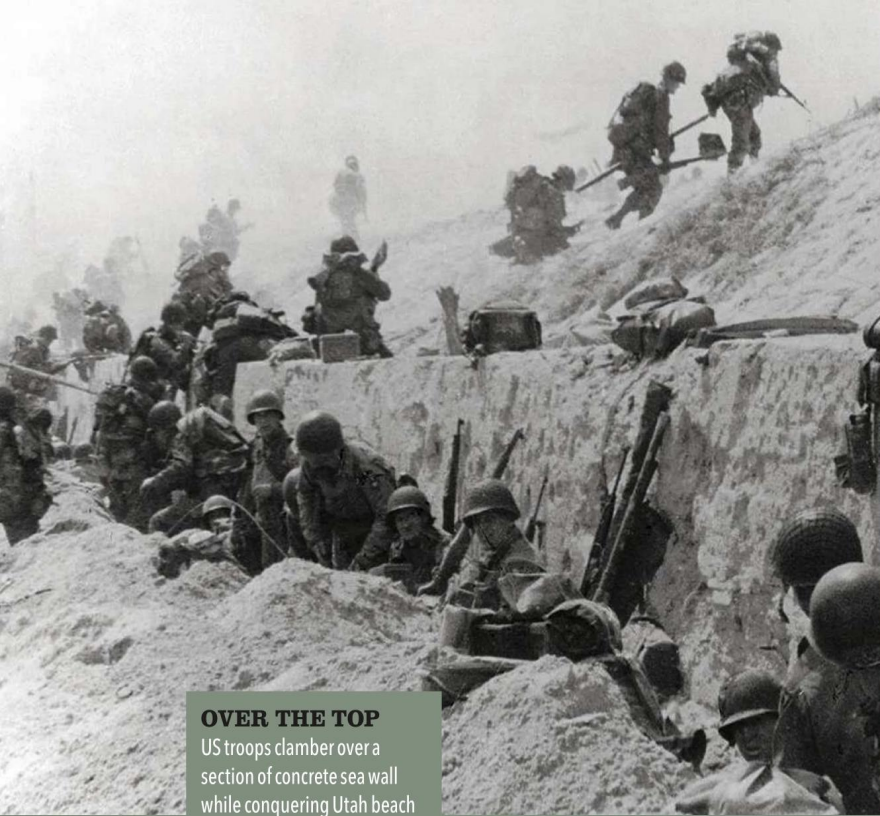
## Hitler’s initial reaction was one of excitement, declaring the landings to be diversionary operations



### ESTABLISHING A BEACHHEAD

Despite the earlier bloodshed, the Allies eventually managed to secure Omaha beach, enabling them to bring more men and equipment ashore





**OVER THE TOP**  
US troops clamber over a section of concrete sea wall while conquering Utah beach



Leonard Lomell discovered and destroyed five guns concealed in an orchard above the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc

## Leonard Lomell: A RANGER ON POINTE DU HOC

Leonard Lomell was working on the freight trains of New Jersey when he applied to join James Rudder's elite group of US Rangers. After training, he was ready for his D-Day assignment: an audacious attack on the great German guns on the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc. "This mission was deemed vital," said General Omar Bradley, because those six guns "could fatally wreck our invasion forces".

But there was a major difficulty: Lomell and company would have to scale the near-vertical cliffs using ropes and grapnels. They would then have to kill all the Germans before knocking out the guns.

Lomell was shot as he climbed the cliffs, but the bullet "didn't hit any organs or bones" so he went off in search of the guns. When he finally reached the emplacements, he got the shock of his life. The guns were not there.

Lomell smelled a rat: they had either been moved or hidden. He and his platoon sergeant, Jack Kahn, decided to scout out the area and it wasn't long before they managed to find them.

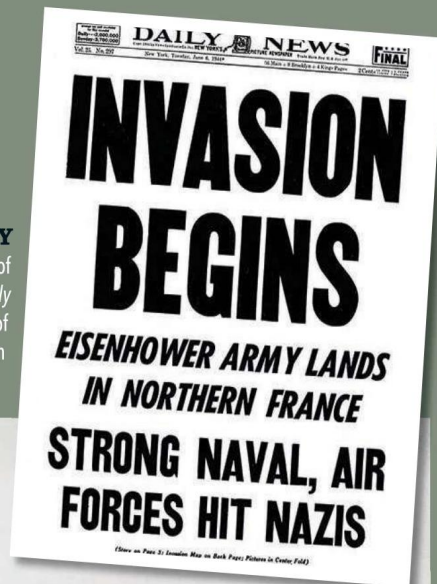
"God!" called Lomell to Kahn. "Here they are!" Concealed in an orchard and half camouflaged by trees were the big guns they had come to destroy. Lomell lodged the thermite grenades into the traversing mechanism of two of the guns. When detonated, they turned everything to a gooey mess of molten steel.

They were making their escape when there was an explosion of staggering force. "We went flying, and ramrods, rocks, dust and everything came down on us." Lomell assumed that a nearby ammunition dump had been hit by a stray shell; in fact, the explosion was the work of their fellow Rangers who had stumbled across the dump while looking for the guns.

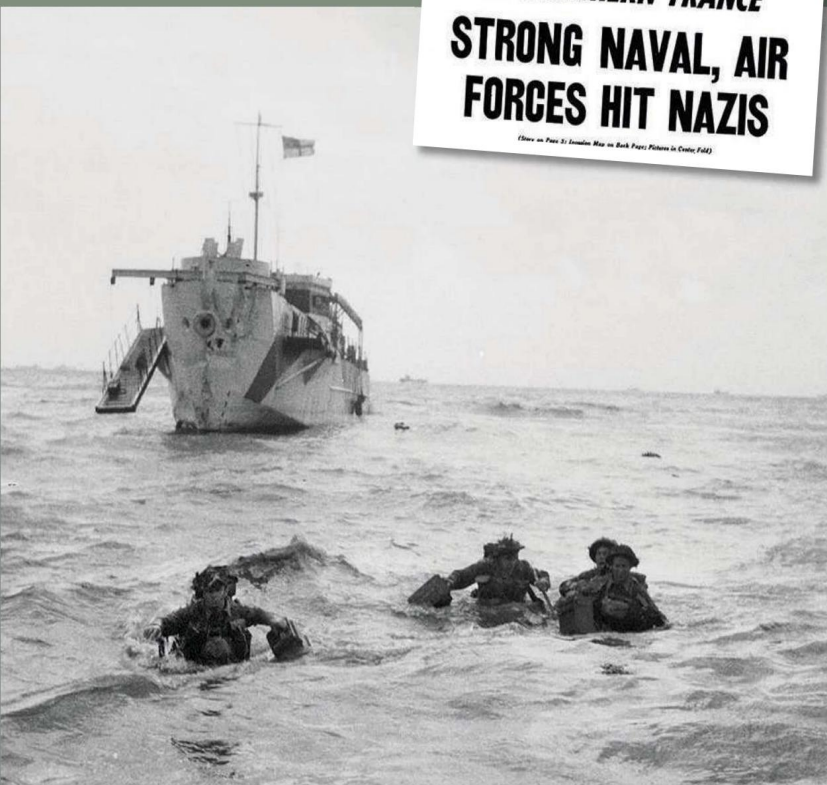
They had blown it sky-high with explosive charges and the resulting blast had destroyed everything in the surrounding area, including a sizeable chunk of field. It was a job well done.



WORDS: GILES MILTON



**BIG STORY**  
The 6 June 1944 edition of the US newspaper *Daily News* heralds the start of the Allied invasion



**DEEP TROUBLE**  
British troops battle the tide as they make their final approach towards the 'Queen' sector of Sword beach



**10:00**

The Germans remove 92 hostages and resistance fighters from their cells in Caen prison and start summarily executing them in the courtyard.

**10:00**

A German fighter-bomber attacks British airborne troops holding Bénouville bridge, but its bomb fails to explode and bounces off the steel girders into the canal.

**10:15**

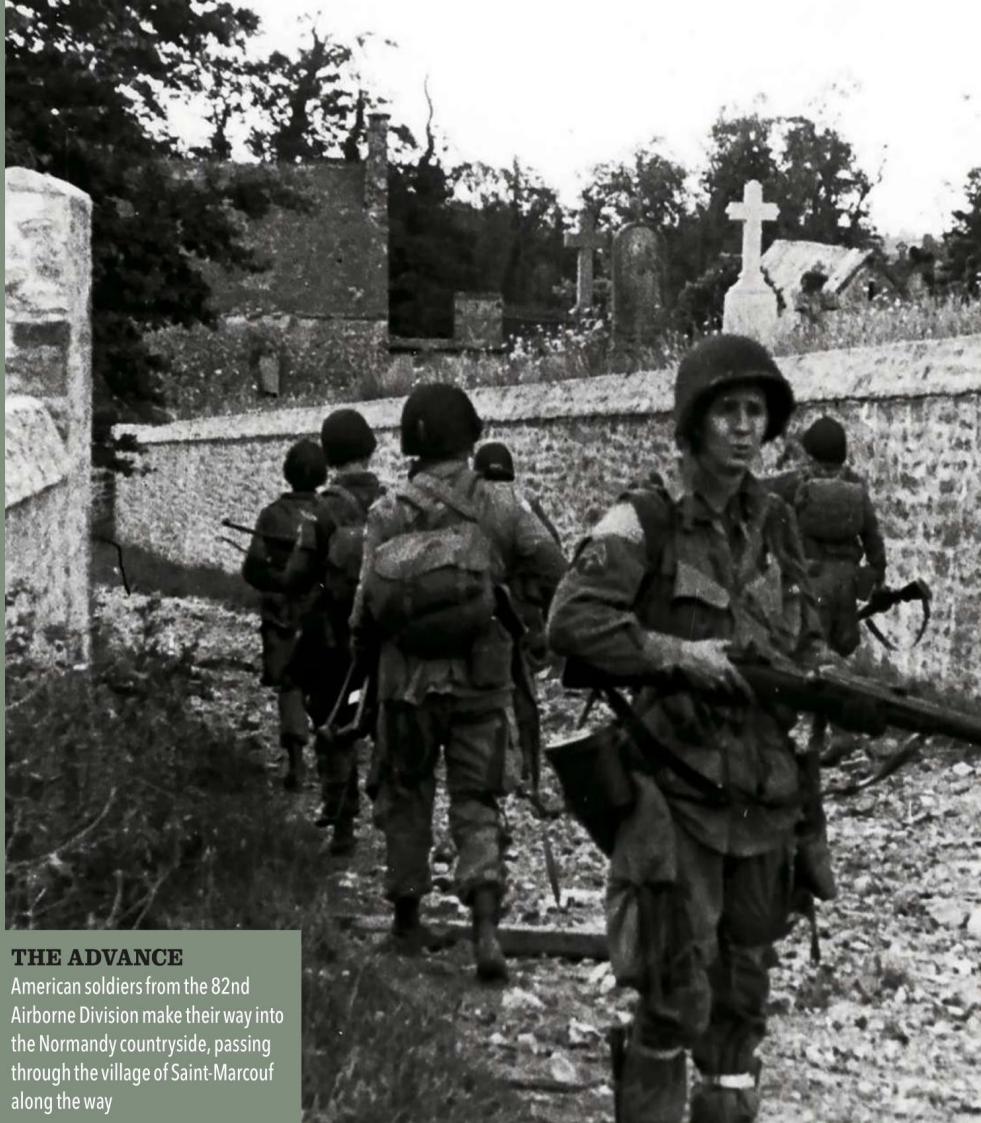
Confusion is the chief characteristic of the German forces in Normandy, and so great is the chaos that no one thinks to alert Rommel until his chief of staff, Hans Speidel, calls him at his home in Herrlingen in southern Germany.

As he is given a briefing, Rommel mutters: "How stupid of me." His wife, Lucie, says the call from Speidel "changed him... there was a terrible tension". He sets off immediately by car for his HQ in La Roche-Guyon, nearly 500 miles west.

**10:18**

Although an escape route has been found off Omaha beach, the situation remains critical and nearly 2,000 men lie dead or wounded. Two destroyers, USS *Thompson* and *McCook*, approach the coast to within 1,100 meters and bombard the German positions east of Moulins. They succeed in destroying the two 75mm guns of Pointe de la Percée that have caused carnage among the invaders.

Back on the beach, Colonel George Taylor rallies the survivors and cries: "Two sorts of people are going to stay on this beach, those who are dead and those who are going to die. Let's get the hell out of here!"



### THE ADVANCE

American soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division make their way into the Normandy countryside, passing through the village of Saint-Marcouf along the way



### IN ENEMY HANDS

Canadian soldiers guard a group of German prisoners outside the entrance to bunker WN-28 at Bernières-sur-Mer, located on the edge of Juno beach





**10:30**

Fierce battles are now being fought inland, and at Neuville-au-Plain – a village approximately eight miles west of Utah – D Company of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, hold off a German counterattack despite the enemy's superior numerical strength.

**10:55**

Captain Joe Dawson and the 200 men of G Company, 16th US Infantry Regiment, are approaching Colleville-sur-Mer from the west when the enemy springs an ambush. "There was some honeysuckle growing on the right of us," said Private First Class Carl Atwell. "We didn't know it at the time but it was full of Germans."

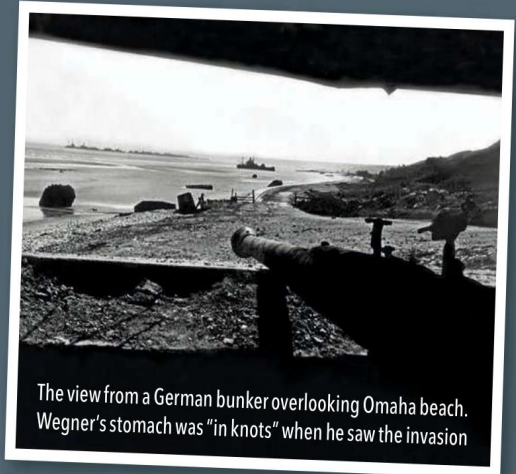
As the enemy opens fire, a deadly game of cat and mouse ensues among the shrubs and hedgerows in front of Colleville. It will take G Company two hours to subdue the Germans. "It was small units firing and falling back that constituted our opposition, and was both deadly and time-consuming," said Dawson.

**11:00**

At Utah the 4th Division heads inland from exit number 2, the only open causeway from the beach, and the two men directing traffic are Major-General Raymond Barton,

commander of the 4th Division, and Brigadier-General Teddy Roosevelt Jr.

The latter, in the words of Major Gerden Johnson of the 12th Infantry Regiment, is "stomping up and down the dusty road, leaning on his cane and smoking his pipe almost as unperturbed as though he were in the middle of Times Square". Roosevelt waves as Johnson passes him and yells: "It's a great day for hunting, isn't it?" In total the 4th Division has suffered 197 casualties, 60 of which occurred while at sea.



The view from a German bunker overlooking Omaha beach. Wegner's stomach was "in knots" when he saw the invasion

## Karl Wegner: A GERMAN CONSCRIPT ON OMAHA BEACH

Karl Wegner was a 19-year-old from Hanover, a boyish lad stationed in strongpoint WN-71 just above Omaha beach. He had spent the previous few hours cowering in his dugout, praying he would survive the ferocious naval bombardment being unleashed by the Allied fleet anchored off-shore.

Drained by the shelling, he dozed for a moment by resting his head on his machine gun. He was woken by a vigorous shake from a comrade: hundreds of landing craft could be seen getting into formation. "Suddenly, they all turned and began to come straight in towards the beach." Wegner was flushed with fear. "The sweat rolled down my brow as I watched these boats come closer. My stomach was in knots."

His commanding officer, Lance-Corporal Lang, sensed his fear and crashed the butt of his pistol onto his helmet. This had the desired effect. "The metallic clang brought me to life and I pulled the trigger up tight." It was something he had practiced on countless occasions, but never against living targets. He watched the landing craft grind into the shore and saw the first enemy troops began their advance. And then he yanked hard on the trigger. "The machine gun roared, sending hot lead into the men running along the beach."

Some collapsed into the sand. Others desperately sought cover, only to find there was no shelter on that exposed beach. It was so easy to kill. Wegner was shooting down youngsters the same age as him. Yet he knew that they would kill him, if only they could reach his strongpoint. "Now was not the time to think of right or wrong, only of survival." He pulled on the trigger once again and sent another hail of bullets into the advancing soldiers. "After the first few moments had passed, my mind became automated. I would fire in short bursts."

If this was the long-awaited Allied invasion, he thought, it looked set to end in a massacre.

WORDS: GILES MILTON



### A HUGE COST

Dead soldiers in stretchers lie in a temporary cemetery on the cliffs overlooking Omaha beach



**11:10**

As the Americans begin to push inland from Utah to link up with their airborne troops, Major von der Heydte of the 6th Fallschirmjäger is trying to organise a counterattack. His attempts are hampered by poor radio communication with other units and a lack of motorised transport. German units falling back from the beachhead are attached by Major von der Heydte to his regiment.

**11:12**

In his bunker overlooking Omaha, Heinrich Severloh continues firing at the Americans. "At first the corpses were 500 metres away, then 400, then 150. There was blood everywhere; screams, dead and dying. The swell of the sea bobbed more bodies onto the beach," he recalled. "There were small pauses when no landing craft came, and I could cool down the machine gun."

**11:22**

Despite the gunfire, more Americans are beginning to get off the beaches, and the 5th Battalion of Rangers scale the bluffs on the route pioneered by Joe Dawson and head for the village of Surraín. They

### TAKEN PRISONER

Surrendering German soldiers are marched across Juno beach

radio a message to General Omar Bradley, commanding general of the US First Army, who is currently on board the USS *Augusta*. "Things look better," they say.

**11:27**

In contrast, the messages being sent by the German defenders are becoming more desperate. The 916th Grenadier Regiment reports that the Americans are on the high ground at Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer beach, and are ordered to "counterattack to push back the enemy at sea".

**11:59**

The Canadians are pushing inland from Juno beach, but their progress is hindered by some of the 14,000 mines sown by the Germans between Courseulles and Bernières. The area beyond Bernières has been flooded and the advance is delayed, while engineers sink a tank in the swamp to create a bridge to allow the infantry and armour to push on. ●

### READY TO ROLL

Canadian soldiers remove the waterproofing from their tanks shortly after arriving on the beach

ALAMY/CANADA DEPT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE-LAC-PA-132898





# D-DAY IN NUMBERS



**6,939**

ALLIED VESSELS  
DELIVERING TROOPS



**156,000**

TOTAL ALLIED TROOPS



**11,590**

ALLIED AIRCRAFT WITH  
14,674 SORTIES FLOWN



**23,250**



**34,250**



**24,970**



**21,400**



**28,845**

UTAH

OMAHA

GOLD

JUNO

SWORD



**23,400**

ALLIED AIRBORNE TROOPS

SOURCES: THE D-DAY STORY, PORTSMOUTH, BBC,  
AND THE NATIONAL D-DAY MEMORIAL FOUNDATION.  
SOME NUMBERS APPROXIMATE



## D-Day: Hour by Hour

# AFTERNOON

12:00 – 17:00

### ON THE LOOKOUT

Men of the British 6th Airborne Division guard a road junction near Ranville. As D-Day stretched on into the afternoon, Allied forces were beginning to make their way inland



With large numbers of men now on the ground, the Allies continue their push inland and attempt to seize Caen. The Germans advance with their tanks in a bid to resist the attacks, but they are losing more territory by the minute...

BY GAVIN MORTIMER

IWM (B 5291)





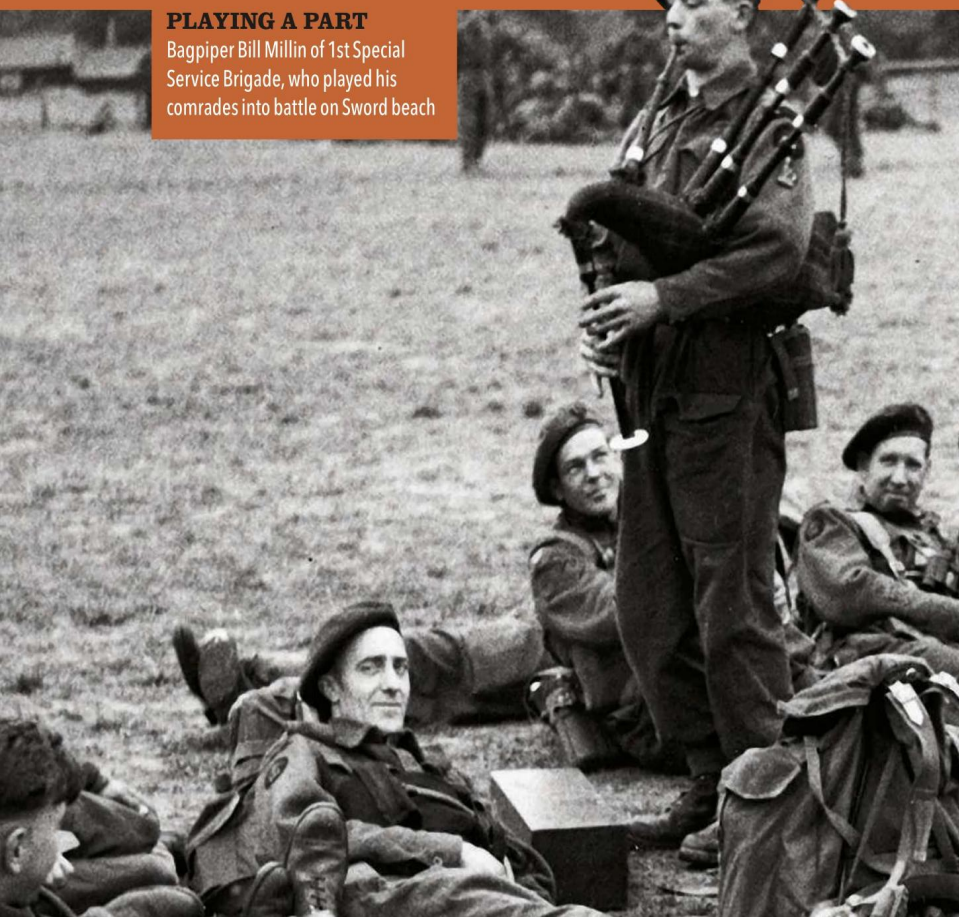
#### MARCHING BAND

Lord Lovat's commandos land on Sword beach. The back of bagpiper Bill Millin can be seen in the foreground



#### PLAYING A PART

Bagpiper Bill Millin of 1st Special Service Brigade, who played his comrades into battle on Sword beach



**“This vast operation is undoubtedly the most complicated and difficult that has ever occurred”**



#### RUSHING TO THE SCENE

Field Marshal Erwin Rommel raced to Normandy in his staff car as soon as it became clear that the Allied invasion was underway



### STROLLING ASHORE

Canadian troops tread through the low tide at Bernières-sur-Mer, facing seemingly little resistance



**12:00**

Twelve long hours after the invasion first began, three Regina Rifle Companies of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division join forces to advance on Revers, having already liberated Courseulles.

**12:15**

In London, Winston Churchill addresses parliament and tells them: "During the night and the early hours of this morning, the first of the series of landings in force upon the European continent has taken place... I cannot, of course, commit myself to any particular details. Reports are coming in in rapid succession.

"So far the commanders who are engaged report that everything is proceeding according to plan. And what a plan! This vast operation is undoubtedly the most complicated and difficult that has ever occurred... Thank God, we enter upon it with our great allies all in good heart and all in good friendship."

**12:15**

Rommel has been on the road for two hours but his staff car is still a long way from its destination of La Roche-Guyon, halfway between Paris and the Normandy city of Rouen. The field marshal says nothing other than to occasionally urge on his driver with a cry of "Tempo! Tempo! Tempo!"

**12:30**

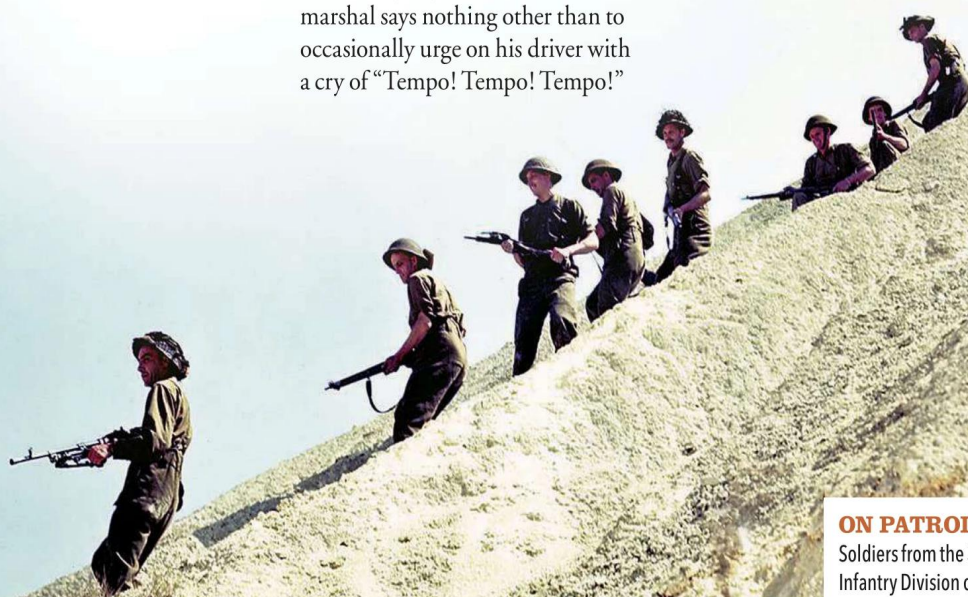
Commandos from the British 1st Special Service Brigade, led by Brigadier Lord Lovat, are in good heart as they approach the airborne forces dug in at the Bénouville and Ranville bridges. They march behind the bagpipes of Bill Millin.

**12:30**

British forces are making good progress inland from Sword beach, and the coastal strongpoints at La Brèche and Hermanville-sur-Mer have been captured. The 185th Infantry Brigade, which landed in the second wave, is now advancing inland.

**12:40**

At Gold beach, the 1st Battalion of Britain's Hampshire Regiment has run into fierce German resistance at Le Hamel, but elsewhere the continuing push inland is as deep as four miles. The 47 Royal Marine Commando has reached as far west as Port-en-Bessin, attempting to capture the neighbouring town to Colleville-sur-Mer.



### ON PATROL

Soldiers from the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division carve out their territory in this propaganda shot





### 12:55

Meanwhile, on the outskirts of Colleville-sur-Mer, Captain Joe Dawson and his G Company have overcome German resistance to reach the western edge of the town, where they are joined by soldiers from other units who have followed their route up the bluffs from Omaha.

### 13:00

Since landing on Gold beach, Sergeant-Major Stanley Hollis of Britain's Green Howards has been inspiring his men with his courage. He has knocked out two pillboxes, captured a trench and taken dozens of prisoners. By now his company has reached the village of Crépon, and Hollis leads an attack on an enemy position containing a field gun and a machine gun nest. As a result of his leadership and gallantry he is the only recipient that day of the Victoria Cross – the highest honour for British and Commonwealth armed forces.

### 13:00

At Omaha beach, bunker WN-72 in the 'Dog Green' sector is captured, opening up Exit D1 and the route to the village of Vierville-sur-Mer.

### 13:00

Major Werner Pluskat, who had spotted the invasion fleet from his bunker at Omaha as dawn broke, finally reaches his HQ in Étréham after an arduous five-mile trek on foot. He tells his colonel that the defenders are perilously low on ammunition, but learns that the supply convoy has been destroyed in an air attack and none will be available until nightfall at the earliest.

### 13:15

Major Friedrich von der Heydte meets his battalion commanders of the 6th Fallschirmjäger and orders the 1st Battalion to Sainte-Marie-du-Mont, where it is to block any further American push inland. The 2nd Battalion is to probe further north in the Cotentin peninsula to gauge the strength of the landing force.

### SOLID REMINDER

Bunker WN-72 as it stands today. Its capture at around 1pm opened up a vital exit route to Vierville-sur-Mer

### TOWN IN RUINS

The Allies planned to seize Caen on D-Day, but it would take weeks of intense bombing and fighting to finally do so

ALAMY/AGF IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES





### PUT TO NEW USE

Having conquered Omaha beach, US engineers transform German bunker WN-65 into a signal post



**Hollis knocked out two pillboxes, captured a trench and took dozens of prisoners**

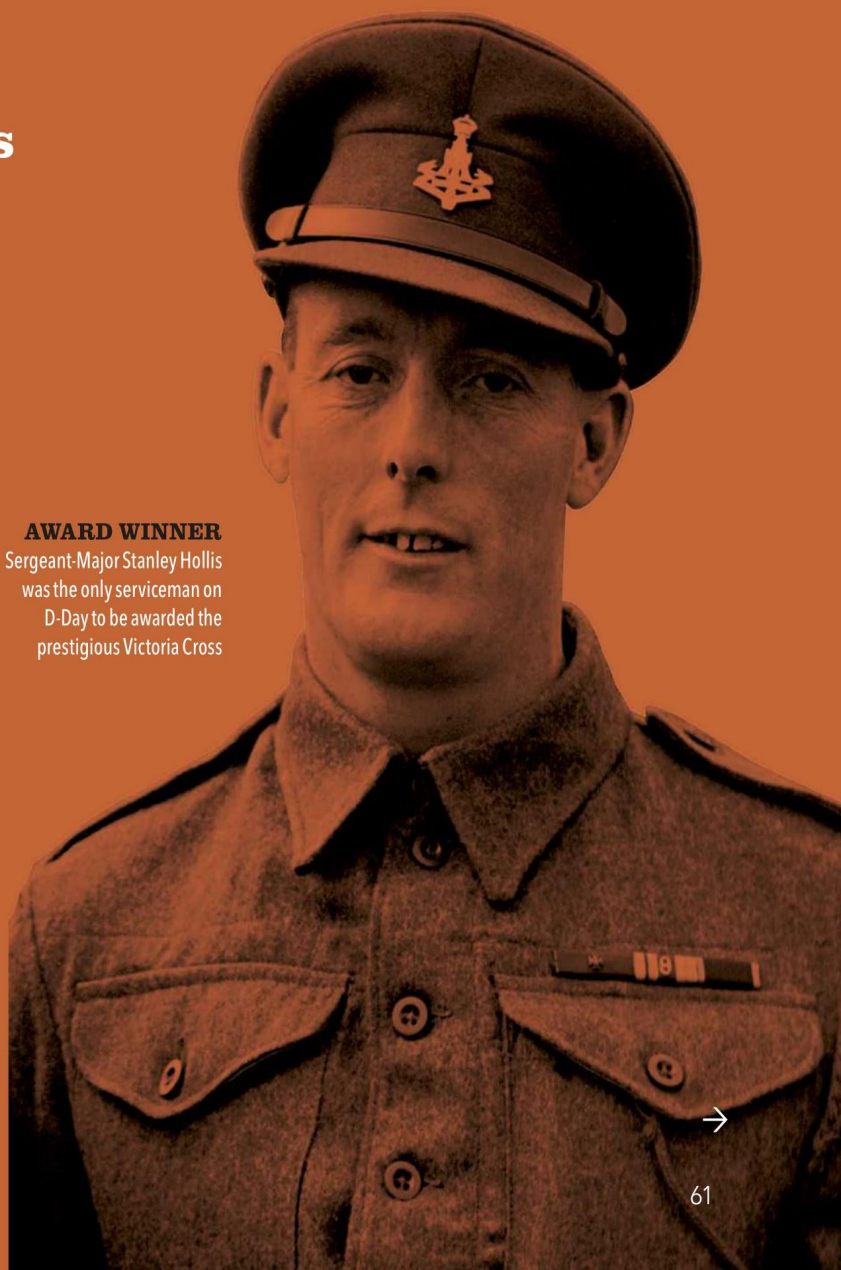


### LOCAL HERO

A memorial commemorating Hollis and his outstanding gallantry stands in his home town of Middlesbrough

### AWARD WINNER

Sergeant-Major Stanley Hollis was the only serviceman on D-Day to be awarded the prestigious Victoria Cross





### 13:30

The Allies carry out their first aerial raid on Caen with B-24s of the 2nd Bombardment Division, US 8th Air Force, dropping 155 tons of bombs. Civilian casualties are numerous.

### 13:30

German mortars from a nearby chateau are making life uncomfortable for the airborne troops holding the Bénouville and Ranville bridges. However, enemy snipers are taking the heaviest toll on commandos, who are en route to take up defensive positions on the extreme left of the Allied landings from the beachhead at Ouistreham.

“One after another, these young chaps just crumpled,” recalled Dennis Fox, an airborne officer. “You didn’t hear the shot, you just saw them crumple.”

### 14:00 – 15:00

There is confusion, disorder and anger among the 124 tanks of the 21st Panzer Division, who an hour earlier had been close to the British positions at the Bénouville bridge. However, as they were forming up to launch a mass armour assault, they had received orders to abort and drive towards the beachhead on the other side of the Orne.

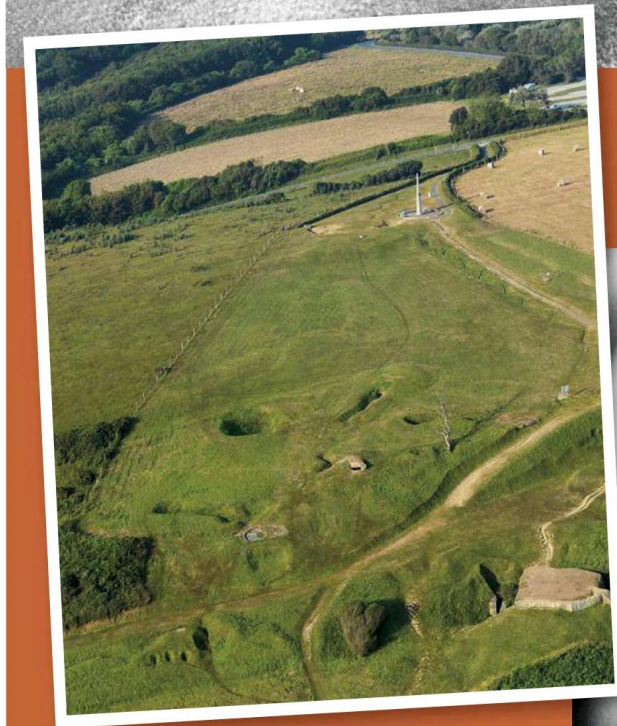
“The regrouping of the division took hours,” said regimental commander Major Hans von Luck. “Most of the units from the east side of Caen and the Orne had to squeeze through the eye of a needle at Caen and over the only bridges available in this sector [while] under virtually constant bombardment from the navy and fighter-bombers.” More than 50 tanks will be lost as the Panzers backtrack and there is bitterness among the crews at the virtual absence of German air support.

### 14:00 – 15:00

Elsewhere, it is a time of comparative calm and consolidation as both sides replenish and regroup.

#### CONCRETE PLANS

Components of two ‘Mulberry’ harbours were dragged across the Channel and floated into position, allowing the Allies to bring crucial cargo ashore later in the Normandy campaign

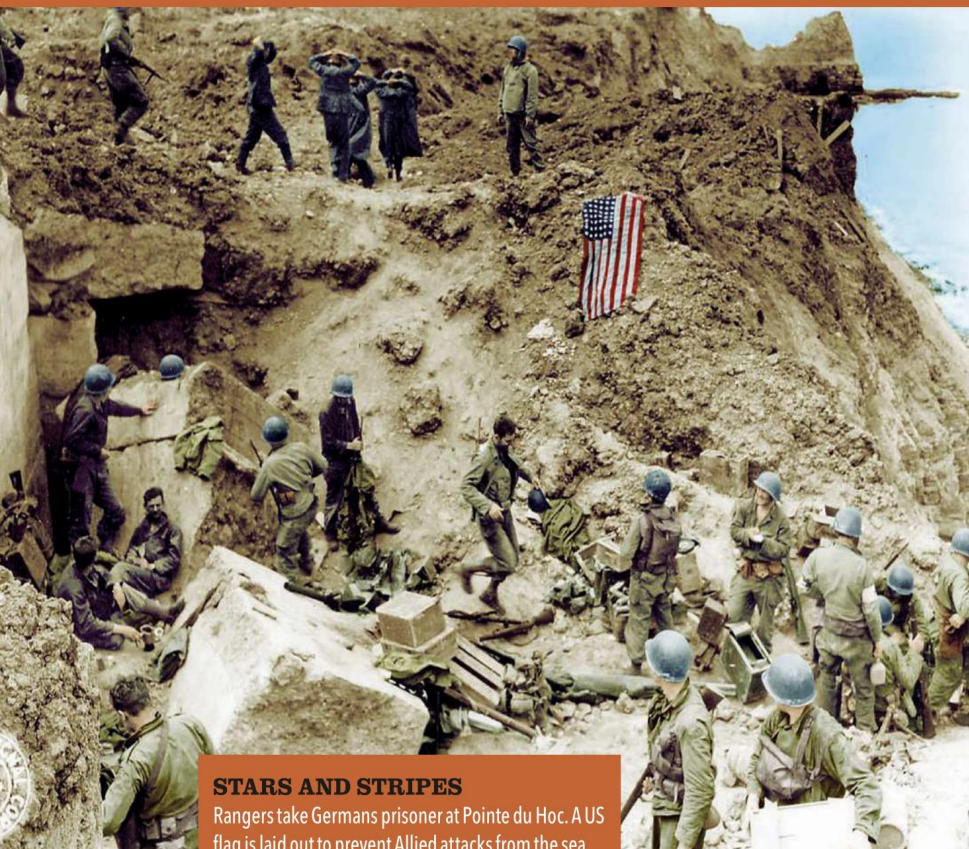


#### BEYOND OMAHA

The area surrounding WN-62 today includes a memorial to the US 1st Infantry Division (visible top right)

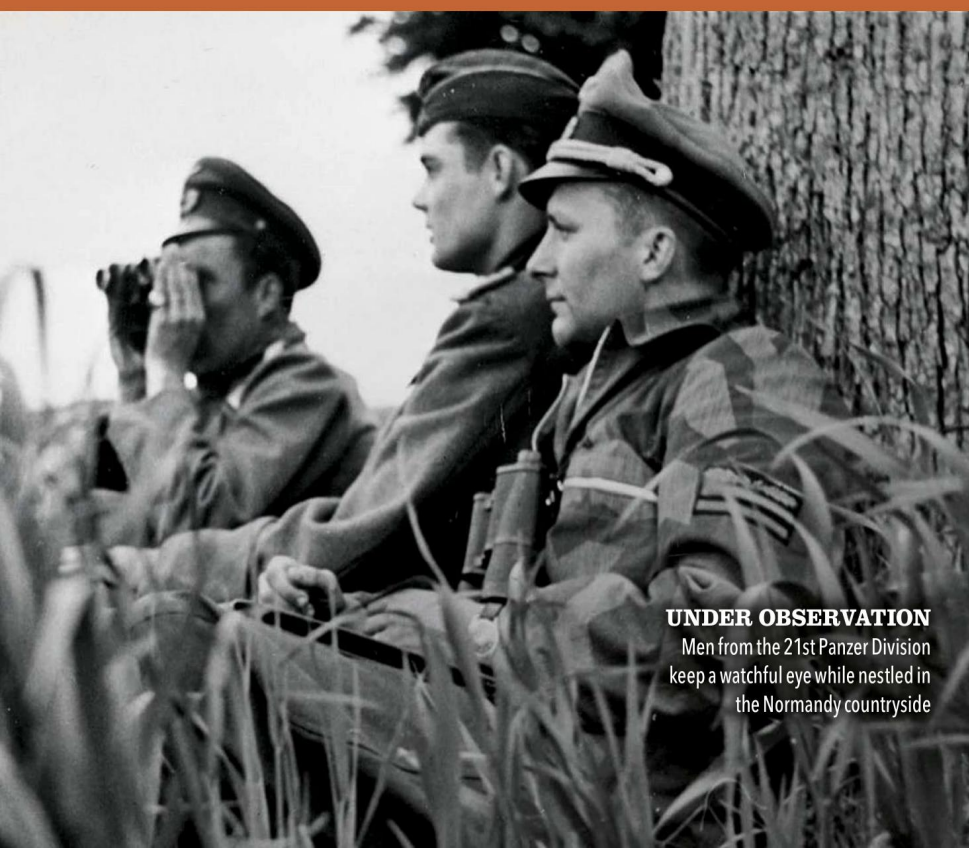


**“I ran from bomb crater to bomb crater behind our bunker complex. I waited but he never came”**



#### STARS AND STRIPES

Rangers take Germans prisoner at Pointe du Hoc. A US flag is laid out to prevent Allied attacks from the sea



#### UNDER OBSERVATION

Men from the 21st Panzer Division keep a watchful eye while nestled in the Normandy countryside

#### 15:00

On their way across the English Channel are the first 400 components of two massive artificial harbours code-named ‘Mulberry’, one of which will be assembled off Omaha beach in front of Colleville-sur-Mer, and the other off Gold beach in front of Arromanches. An extraordinary feat of engineering constructed from concrete and steel, they will help the Allies to resupply the invasion force until an existing port on the French coast is finally secured.

#### 15:30

Heinrich Severloh and Lieutenant Bernhard Frerking, the last two defenders of WN-62, abandon their position on Omaha as the Americans approach. “I ran from bomb crater to bomb crater behind our bunker complex. I waited but he never came,” recalled Severloh, who fired an estimated 12,500 rounds with his K98 rifle and his MG 42 machine gun. Although Frerking is killed as he tries to escape, Severloh is captured in the evening and sent to a prisoner of war camp in the US.

#### 15:40

Günther Blumentritt, recently promoted to the rank of General der Infanterie (General of the Infantry), calls Lieutenant-General Speidel at Rommel’s HQ to inform him that Hitler has agreed to release the 12th SS Panzer Division and the Panzer Lehr Division in order to drive the invaders back into the sea. Speidel knows that the order has come too late.

#### 15:45

On the beach at Omaha, the Allies’ most pressing task is to destroy the double wall between the pillbox and the cliff that bars the way for vehicles. Engineers construct a short wooden platform and on it stack cases of TNT, which they detonate. A bulldozer moves forward, sweeps away the debris and a path is cleared.





A Landing Ship Tank (LST) brings a Sherman to shore in July 1944



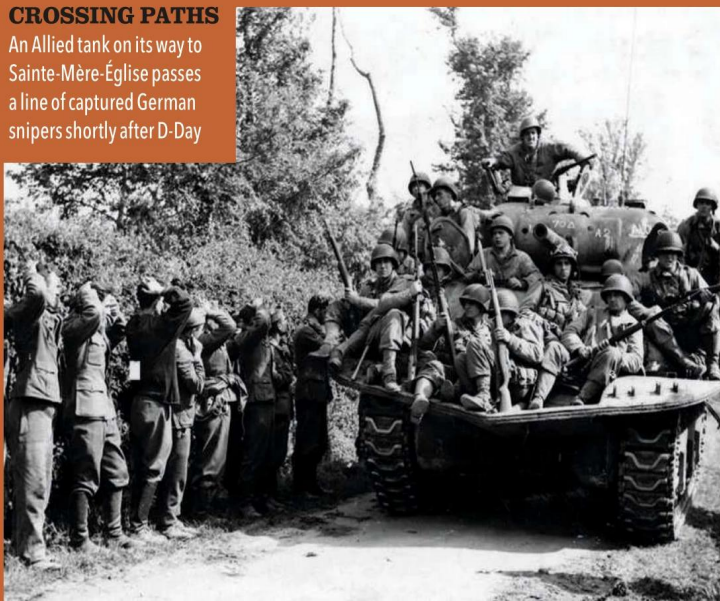
### TAKING AIM

A turret gunner emerges from the top of an M4 Sherman tank during desert operations. Shermans also inflicted heavy damage on the 21st Panzer Division during D-Day



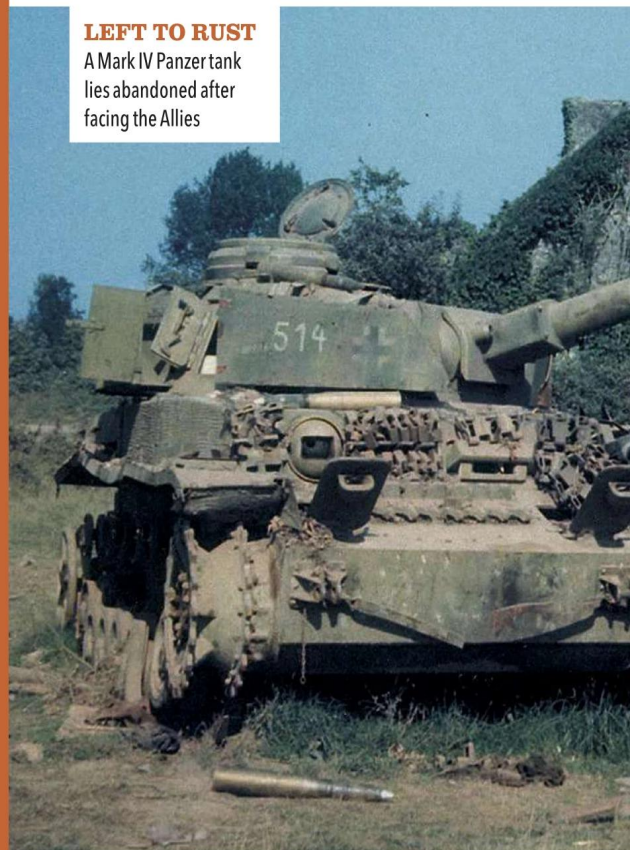
### CROSSING PATHS

An Allied tank on its way to Sainte-Mère-Église passes a line of captured German snipers shortly after D-Day



### LEFT TO RUST

A Mark IV Panzer tank lies abandoned after facing the Allies



### 16:00

Able Company, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division, is dug in on the recently captured La Fièvre bridge on the Merderet river, 4km from Sainte-Mère-Église, when the Germans appear on the causeway from the direction of Cauquigny.

At the front of a column of three tanks are a dozen American paratroopers, forced by the Germans to act as human shields. But when the force is 50 yards from the bridge, the 505th bazooka team of privates Marcus Heim and Lenold Peterson opens fire. As the captured paratroopers dive for cover, the privates knock out two tanks and help – with the aid of a 57mm gun – to destroy the third.

The German infantry withdraws. “This was one of the toughest days of my life,” said Heim, who later received the Distinguished Service Cross for his “extraordinary heroism”.

### 16:00 – 17:00

On Omaha beach, the first American Sherman tank reaches the road linking the beach to Colleville-sur-Mer but is knocked out by an anti-tank gun.





## 16:00 – 17:00

Inland from Gold beach, the Royal Hampshire Battalion has finally crushed the last remains of the German resistance at Le Hamel.

## 16:00 – 17:00

South of Sword beach, Britain's Shropshire Regiment liberates Biéville.

Meanwhile, Allied bombers launch another devastating raid on Caen. Aircraft drop bombs from 9,000ft on bridges over the Orne river.

## 16:20

The Mark IV tanks of the German 21st Panzer Division are now finally ready to

attack the British positions at Périers-sur-le-Dan, led by Colonel Hermann von Oppeln-Bronikowski (featured in the "Frontline Stories" box below).

But as the Panzers climb the rise near Biéville they come under fire from three troops of M4 Sherman tanks armed with the new high-velocity, 17-pounder cannon. Six Panzers are destroyed within the space of just 15 minutes, leading Oppeln-Bronikowski to order a withdrawal to Lébisey point.

Elsewhere, the Panzers that advance on the Périers heights under Captain Wilhelm von Gottberg meet a similar fate: 10 tanks are lost in quick succession.

Later in the evening, retreating German soldiers pass the tank crews on their way towards Caen. Some of the men appear to be exhausted, while others are drunk. "The war is lost," remarks one Panzer officer. ●

## FRONTLINE STORIES

### Colonel Hermann von Oppeln-Bronikowski: A BRILLIANT SS TANK COMMANDER

Colonel Leopold August Hermann von Oppeln-Bronikowski was one of the great Panzer leaders of Nazi Germany, "an exuberant, dashing, gay individual" with a noble Prussian pedigree dating back to the age of chivalry. He certainly looked the part, with oiled hair and an engaging smile.

He was also a genius at tank warfare, personally destroying 25 Soviet tanks on the Eastern Front. Now, his regiment's precision guns had the ability to wreak carnage on the newly landed Allies.

But his morning offensive was stalled by the OKW (Supreme Command) staff in Bavaria, who refused to let him put the 124 Mark IV tanks of his Panzer division into action. Not until the afternoon of D-Day was he told to wheel his tanks northwards with the aim of driving a wedge

between the British on Sword beach and the Canadians on Juno.

"Oppeln," said General Erich Marcks, "the future of Germany may very well rest on your shoulders. If you don't push the British back into the sea, we've lost the war." Oppeln-Bronikowski snapped a crisp response. "General, I intend to attack immediately."

But it took hours to get into position, and when he advanced, he was struck by disaster. "The moment the tanks reached the ridge, they were suddenly hit, one after the other, by British anti-tank fire." Oppeln-Bronikowski had a soldier's respect for the enemy and would later admit that he was outgunned.

He continued his advance with greater caution, but found himself facing a bruising assault from the British anti-tank guns. The Stafford-



shire Yeomanry troops opened up with everything they had, shredding metal and gouging craters.

Colonel von Oppeln-Bronikowski knew he was outclassed. He also knew there was no hope of recapturing the high ground that lay between him and the coast. As the enemy fire increased in intensity, his great Panzer advance was stalled and then stopped by the brawn of the Staffordshires. Dejected and dismayed, he had to admit defeat.

WORDS: GILES MILTON



## D-Day: Hour by Hour

# **EVENING**

## **17:00 – 00:00**



GETTY IMAGES



As the 'Longest Day' draws to a close, the Allies consolidate their positions in northern France, establishing a beachhead that allows them to deliver vital reinforcements. Meanwhile, the rest of the world begins to realise the magnitude of the situation...

BY GAVIN MORTIMER



**HELP FROM ABOVE**

Allied gliders over Utah beach, ready to land with more men and supplies. As 6 June drew to a close, the invasion forces were looking to secure their new foothold in France



**17:00**

The 12th SS Panzer Division, under the command of the notorious Colonel Kurt Meyer, is now making its way towards the beachhead. But progress from their assembly area south-west of Caen is slow because of congested roads and aerial attacks, and the division's 229 tanks and assault guns, 658 armoured vehicles, 2,000 soft-skinned vehicles and 20,540 men are soon behind schedule.

Nonetheless, Meyer is confident of success. Describing the Allies as "little fish", Meyer promises to "throw them back into the sea in the morning".

**17:00**

Charles de Gaulle, head of the Free French in London, finishes recording a barnstorming address to the French people that will be broadcast later in the evening. He tells them: "The battle has begun and France will fight it with fury."

**17:10**

With the beachhead secure, reinforcements start leaving England by ship.

**18:00**

Field Marshal Rommel finally arrives in the eastern French city of Reims, 100 miles from his HQ in La Roche-Guyon. He phones his chief of staff and receives the latest worrying news. When he returns to his car he complains bitterly to Hellmuth Lang, his aide-de-camp, about the lethargic response to the invasion.

Six weeks earlier, as he had stood inspecting the beach defences on Normandy, Rommel had warned Lang that "the first 24 hours of the invasion will be decisive".

**18:00**

The final bunker in the Sword beach sector is finally taken by the British with the capture of 70 Germans. Nicknamed 'Daimler' by the Allies, it is a converted horsepower battery position, sited south

of Ouistreham, with four 155mm gun pits, three casemates, a minefield and two tanks.

**18:12 – 19:00**

The US 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, begins landing on Omaha, but inland from the beach the battle for Colleville-sur-Mer still rages. By early evening, Captain Joe Dawson and the men of G Company have linked up with the remnants of E Company and intense house-to-house fighting begins.

Unaware that its soldiers are there, four US navy destroyers begin bombarding Colleville with 55lb shells. "It levelled the town," recalled Dawson. "Absolutely levelled it."

**19:00**

On an eight-mile-long strip of coast between Juno and Sword beaches there remains a German strongpoint called Lion-sur-Mer. The German 1st Battalion of the 192nd Panzergrenadier Regiment and six tanks reach the strongpoint after fleeing fighting at the nearby commune of Périers-sur-le-Dans.

**19:00 – 20:00**

British soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment, reach the bridges over Ranville and Bénouville to relieve the British airborne troops.



AKG IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

**ON THE HUNT**

African-American troops scour a farm near Vierville-sur-Mer in search of a hidden German sniper



**DAMAGED GOODS**

Defunct Panzer tanks are stored by the side of the road. As D-Day progressed, the Germans suffered heavy losses





**Rommel finally arrived, complaining bitterly about the lethargic response to the invasion**



#### **YOUNG RECRUITS**

Two soldiers from Kurt Meyer's 12th SS Panzer Division, which included many Hitler Youth members



#### **DEFIANT OPPOSITION**

Colonel Kurt Meyer, commander of the 12th SS Panzer Division, promised to throw the Allied forces "back into the sea"

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES







#### BACK TO BASE

A bomber flies over Sword beach and Lion-sur-Mer (visible top right) on its way back to England



#### INTO ACTION

Sherman tanks of the 13th/18th Royal Hussars, which helped capture the Hillman fortress

**Captain Dawson finally got a message through to cease the bombardment on Colleville**

#### 19:00 – 19:25

Captain Dawson finally gets a message through to the US Navy to cease its bombardment on Colleville.

#### 19:35

The destroyer USS *Harding* concentrates its fire on the neighbouring village of Vierville-sur-Mer.

#### 19:55

Rommel arrives at his HQ in La Roche-Guyon, where his chief of staff informs him that the attack of the 21st Panzer Division has failed. His aide-de-camp, Lang, asks Rommel if he believes they can still drive the Allies back into the sea.

"I hope we can," replies the field marshal. "I've nearly always succeeded up to now."

#### 20:00

The six SAS men who parachuted into Normandy at 00:40 have managed to avoid German search parties throughout the day and make contact with the French Resistance, who lead them to a safe house.

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES/NATIONAL ARCHIVES USA





**20:00**

Having marched nine miles from the beachhead amid sniper and mortar fire, No 4 Commando is instructed by Lord Lovat to advance to the village of Hauger and dig defensive positions on what is the most easterly flank of the Allied landing zone.

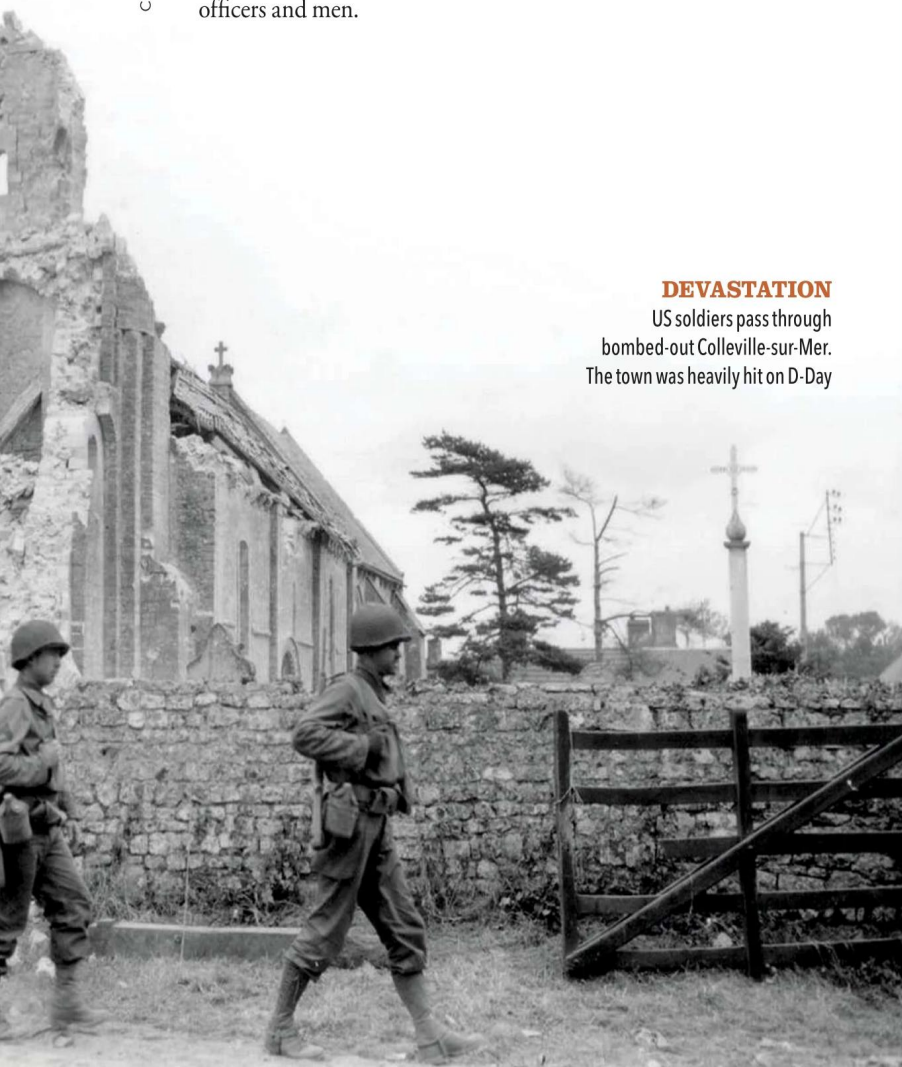
**20:00 – 21:00**

An hour after reaching Arromanches, British infantry have now captured the radar station at the top of the eastern plateau and are mopping up German resistance inside the town.

**20:15**

The British 1st Suffolk Regiment, supported by tanks of the 13th/18th Hussars, capture the Hillman fortress overlooking Colleville-sur-Orne. A 24-hectare bunker complex, this heavily fortified defensive system had been the command post for 150 German officers and men.

COURTESY THERECORD.COM-WILLIAM MCCORMICK



#### DEVASTATION

US soldiers pass through bombed-out Colleville-sur-Mer. The town was heavily hit on D-Day



## Bill McCormick: LEADING THE BOLD THRUST INLAND

It was late afternoon when three Canadian tanks began driving deep inland from Juno beach. In the lead tank, commanding from the front, was a grinning 23-year-old from Ontario named Bill McCormick (pictured above, kneeling in centre). He had joined the armoured division because “he liked to be on the move”. Now, he was moving into territory that was firmly in enemy hands.

After blasting a passage through Creully, he ventured further south, towards Camilly and onwards to Bretteville-l’Orgueilleuse. His ultimate goal was the airfield at Carpiquet, more than eight miles inland.

McCormick and his crew soon got the chance to demonstrate how to deal with enemy vehicles. As a German scout car came bowling around a corner, McCormick’s gunner raked it with machine gun fire, while the tank’s driver slammed the Sherman into the front of the vehicle, crushing it against a stone wall and causing it to burst into a fireball.

The driver was instantly killed, ending his life sprawled across the windshield. His two passengers were thrown from the car and in a desperate state. One was twitching violently in the dirt as his muscles went into spasms. The other had been shot in the legs and both his feet were on fire. They were left on the road as a grim calling card from this advance guard of Canadians.

“Come up! Come up!” said McCormick, as he repeatedly tried to call support from the beachhead at Juno, realising that he had a unique opportunity to capture the inland airfield at Carpiquet. This would be invaluable for bringing in much-needed supplies. But he was so far in advance of the wireless operators that his signal was never picked up.

With the greatest reluctance, he realised that he and his men from the 1st Hussars had no choice other than to retreat from their forward position. McCormick’s achievement had been nothing short of outstanding. He had pushed his tanks deeper into France than any other unit on D-Day.







A broadcast from King George on 6 June encouraged the Allies to continue fighting for a world of "goodness and honour"

### 21:00

King George VI addresses Britain, the empire and North America on the BBC, declaring: "After nearly five years of toil and suffering, we must renew that crusading impulse on which we entered the war and met its darkest hour. We and our allies are sure that our fight is against evil and for a world in which goodness and honour may be the foundation of the life of men in every land."

### 21:00

Having beaten off a series of German attacks on Pointe du Hoc, US Rangers are glad to greet men from the 1st Platoon, Company A, 5th Ranger Battalion, from whom they had been separated during the earlier landings at Omaha.

### 21:00

Operation Mallard begins with 246 gliders out of 256 that left England descending on two landing zones north-east of Caen, on the eastern flank of the invasion, to reinforce the British 6th Airborne Division. A large amount of equipment is also dropped by parachute.

"It is impossible to say with what relief we watched this reinforcement arrive," remarked General Richard Gale, commanding the 6th Airborne.

### 21:00 – 22:00

Similar relief is felt by US troops from the 82nd Airborne Division as Operation Elmira unfolds above them. The glider train lands in two waves, the first comprising 26 aircraft and the second 50. It carries 437 troops, 64 vehicles, 13 anti-tank guns and 24 tons of supplies, coming down in an oval-shaped landing zone a mile and a quarter long, a mile south of Sainte-Mère-Église.

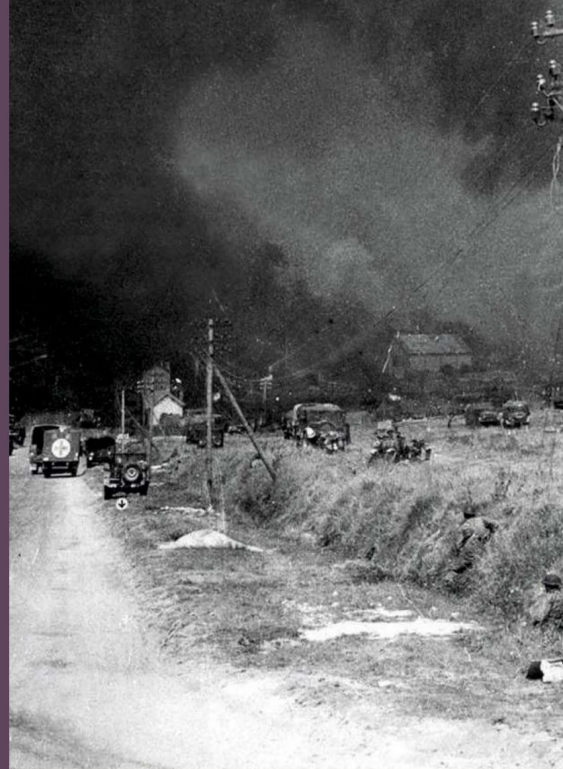
"Wheels touched; put on the brakes; started praying," remembered Darlye Watters, one glider pilot, who landed amid heavy German ground fire. "We did stop – with about 50 feet to spare. Through a kind of a daze, I could hear my co-pilot saying: 'I could kiss you for getting us down OK.'" A total of 26 glider crew are killed in the landings but their courage and precision enables the success of Operation Elmira.

### 21:15

The sight of the air armada from England spooks Major General Feuchtinger, commanding the 21st Panzer Division, who believes they risk being cut off if they remain in their strongpoint at Lion-sur-Mer. He orders a withdrawal inland before darkness descends.

### TAKING COVER

Allied soldiers seek shelter during the bombing of German positions south of Caen. The battle for the city would drag on far beyond D-Day



### GLIDER GRAVEYARD

Landing zone 'N', north of Ranville, pictured the day after the launch of Operation Mallard. The operation saw 246 gliders land equipment

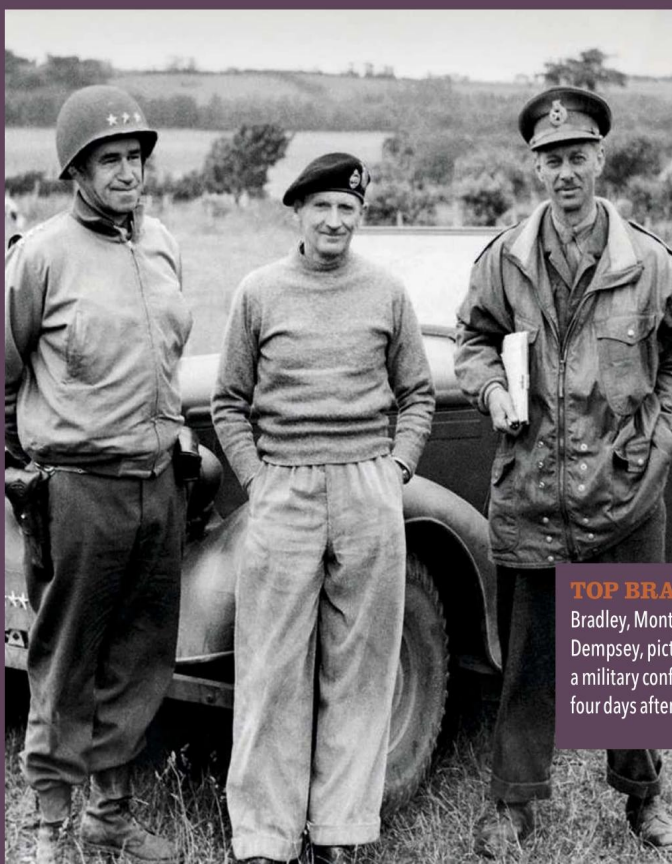
ALAMY/IWM (HU 92976)







## General Montgomery set sail for Normandy, “anxious to make contact” with his allies



GETTY IMAGES

### TOP BRASS

Bradley, Montgomery and Dempsey, pictured at a military conference in France four days after D-Day

### 21:30

General Montgomery sets sail from England for Normandy on board the destroyer HMS *Faulknor*. He describes feeling “anxious to make contact” with General Omar Bradley and British colleague General Miles Dempsey, both of whom are afloat in their command ships off the coast.

### 22:00 – 23:00

The 1st Battalion of the 6th Fallschirmjäger are among the German troops attacking the American gliders, but as darkness falls they pull back towards Saint-Côme-du-Mont, a village which blocks their enemies’ route to the strategically important town of Carentan.

### 22:00

Allied bombers raid Caen for the third time and cause heavy damage to the port district.

### 22:30

British soldiers reach the outskirts of Bayeux to seize the main road linking Caen with Cherbourg. Thirteen miles to the east, the town of Tailleville is captured by the Canadians after hours of fierce fighting in which 34 of their soldiers are killed and 90 wounded.

### 23:00

Peace has finally descended on Omaha, but the sand is thick with the dead and wounded. Major Charles Tegtmeyer, a medical officer on the beach, signals to his colonel: “We are not able to evacuate any of our people. There are no evacuation facilities and something must be done.”





**23:30**

Although darkness has descended on the battlefield, heavy fighting still rages at Pointe du Hoc as the German 914th Grenadier Regiment launches what will be the first of three night attacks against the Rangers on the coastal road defence.

Embedded with the Rangers that evening is *Stars and Stripes* reporter GK Hodenfield, who later reflected: "I gave up hope of getting off Pointe du Hoc alive. No reinforcements in sight, plenty of Germans in front of us, nothing behind us but sheer cliffs and [the] Channel... We were up a creek not only for food and water but also ammunition."

**23:59**

The 'Longest Day' is at an end and more than 156,000 Allied personnel are ashore in France. Casualties are estimated at 10,000 killed, wounded and missing in action, of which 6,603 are Americans, 2,700 British and 946 Canadians.

Estimates of German losses range from 4,000 to 9,000. Although none of the assault forces had secured their first-day objectives, a beachhead has been established and German forces repelled.

**23:59**

The *Washington Evening Star* hits the newsstands with its front page emblazoned with the headline: "Allies advance several miles in France against slight opposition; losses small."

Inside, the paper prints the text of the prayer President Roosevelt will read out to the nation in a live radio address at 22:00 EDT. "Almighty God: our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavour, a struggle to preserve our republic, our religion, and our civilisation, and to set free a suffering humanity. Lead them straight and true; give strength to their arms, stoutness to their hearts, steadfastness in their faith." ●

## The 'Longest Day' was at an end and more than 156,000 Allied personnel were ashore

### HITTING THE HEADLINES

US newspaper *The Evening Star* reports on the day's progress



### BREAKING NEWS

In Times Square, soldiers and civilians watch an electronic sign for the latest updates on events over in Normandy



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**CHANGING TIDES**

A helmet placed on Utah beach  
as part of a D-Day memorial event



# AFTER- MATH & LEGACY

How D-Day and the campaign  
that followed led to the war's  
conclusion, and why the events  
of 1944 still matter today



# THE BATTLE FOR NORMANDY





By the time D-Day had drawn to a close, the Allies had secured a hard-won foothold in northern France. But the fight was far from over. The battle to liberate France raged on as Allied forces were tested to their limits by fierce German resistance while they attempted to push through the Normandy countryside

BY GAVIN MORTIMER

#### KEEPING COVER

Allied troops hide from enemy shelling during the battle of Caen. The town was finally captured after several weeks of intensive fighting. The white markings on their shoulders were later added to the photograph by a censor to hide the name of the battalion



**F**ield-Marshal Erwin Rommel had little sleep on the night of 6 June. He had spent the day in his staff car, urging his driver to keep his foot on the accelerator as they drove the 500 miles between his home in Herrlingen, south-west Germany, and his HQ in La Roche-Guyon.

But before dawn had broken on 7 June, Rommel was already in conference with General Geyr von Schweppenburg, commander of Panzer Group West. The Allied landings the previous day had caught the German military unawares; the führer's unshakeable certainty that the invasion would be in the Calais region had been shattered. Rommel blamed Hitler and his equally inept chief of operations, Colonel-General Alfred Jodl, for their failure to release the two reserve Panzer divisions that, if they had been sent straight to the beachhead, might well have pushed the invaders back into the chill waters of the English Channel.

Not that Rommel was in a position to berate his superiors; he was embarrassed at having left France on 5 June to celebrate his wife's birthday. Such a miscalculation would be difficult to live down among his growing number of detractors within Hitler's inner circle.

But 7 June was not the time for recriminations. Only action would suffice and Rommel had already identified from the map of the invasion zone what he believed was the Allies' most vulnerable point. He had considered attacking the Omaha beachhead, which the American V Corps had secured at such a terrible price, but instead settled on launching his counterattack around Caen. The British had failed in their objective of capturing the city on D-Day, but only just, and should they seize Caen, only 125 miles of flat, unobstructed countryside would lie between them and Paris.

General Bernard Montgomery, in command of Allied ground forces, had arrived off the Normandy coast in the early hours of 7 June, having sailed from Portsmouth the previous evening on board the destroyer HMS *Faulknor*. He ordered 3rd British Division and 3rd Canadian Division to press their attack against Caen, but, as he wrote in his memoirs: "It quickly became apparent that the enemy was concerned for the



#### STOCKING UP

German soldiers load an anti-tank gun with shells

#### CAUGHT OFF GUARD

Erwin Rommel talks tactics with an officer. He decided to focus the German counterattack around Caen

## The first reserve was Battlegroup Meyer, with its fanatical recruits from the Hitler Youth

security of this nodal point, and was quick to bring forward reserve formations to hold us off from the town and prevent the expansion of our bridgehead south of the Caen-Bayeux road."

The first reserve formation to arrive was 'Battlegroup Meyer', an element of the 12th SS Panzer Division. Commanded by the notorious Colonel Kurt Meyer, many of its soldiers were recent recruits from the Hitler Youth, fanatics who committed several atrocities against their enemy as they pushed back the Anglo-Canadian advance with the help of the 21st Panzer Division.



The bloody fighting of 7 June was a grim foretaste of what lay ahead for the Allies as they continued inland from the beachhead. They were now entering 'bocage country', characterised by sunken lanes and high hedgerows: good defensive terrain for tanks and for men armed with *Panzerfaust* anti-tank weapons. Montgomery's plan was to encircle Caen with the 51st Highland Division and the 7th Armoured Division, the latter the 'Desert Rats' of the North Africa campaign.



But when they advanced on 10 June they ran into the tanks of the Panzer Lehr Division. “Obviously the attacking troops were at a disadvantage because they had to move forward,” said Leslie Dinning of the 1st Royal Tank Regiment. “Poke their nose round corners where sitting a few yards up the road was a bloody big Tiger, Panther or a self-propelled gun, literally waiting for us and BANG! You had no chance. It only needed one shot from an enemy tank.”

## A FEARSOME ADVERSARY

No German commander was as lethal as Michael Wittman of the 501st SS Heavy Tank Battalion. In the Soviet Union he had destroyed 117 enemy tanks, and on 13 June his company ambushed the Desert Rats outside Villers-Bocage, destroying 25 tanks and 28 other vehicles.

Panzers weren't the only problem General Montgomery faced in the middle

of June. On the 19th of the month a ferocious storm swept through the Channel, wrecking the two artificial ‘Mulberry’ harbours that had been towed from England. Prior to the storm, 22,000 tons of supplies and equipment were being unloaded each day at the British and US harbours of Arromanches and

Colleville-sur-Mer; during the four days that the storm raged only 12,000 tons were brought ashore at both sites. The British repaired the damage and were able to continue using Arromanches, but the Americans were forced to concede defeat and reverted to beaching craft to bring ashore their supplies.

## BEST LAID PLANS

Loebnitz pier, erected by the Allies as part of Mulberry harbour A, was damaged in a storm and had to be abandoned



## THE ALLIES ADVANCE

An American Sherman tank races past ruined buildings during the Normandy Campaign





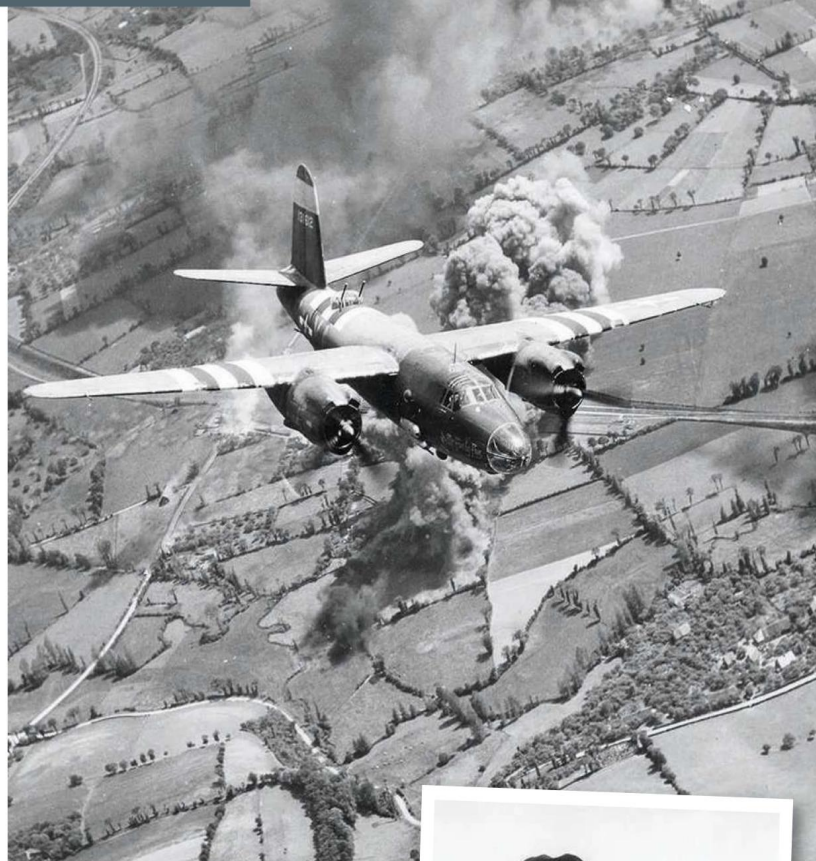
In contrast to the war of attrition being waged around Caen, US troops had made good progress in the fortnight since D-Day. The V Corps beachhead at Omaha and that established by the VII Corps at Utah had been joined so that the American invaders now presented a united front to their enemy.

The immediate objective had been the town of Carentan, which blocked the Americans' path south and east, and was defended by the seasoned troops of the 6th Parachute Regiment. The 101st Airborne captured Carentan on 12 June but the Germans, reinforced by the 17 SS Panzer Grenadier Division, counter-attacked the next day. Easy Company of the 506th Regiment was in danger of being overrun by Panzers when suddenly 60 of their own tanks appeared. "What a wonderful sight it was to see those tanks pouring it to the Germans with those heavy 50-calibre machine guns and just ploughing straight from our lines into the German hedgerows with all those fresh infantry soldiers marching along beside," recalled Lieutenant Dick Winters.

## DARK DAYS FOR ROMMEL

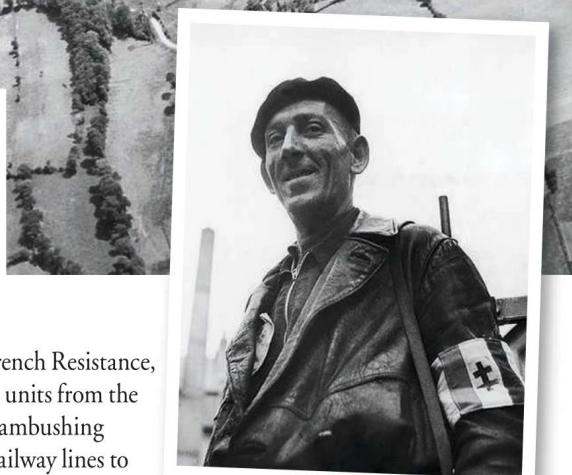
The capture of Carentan was another serious blow for Rommel. For several days his mood had been darkening as fresh reports reached him of the slow progress north of reinforcements. The 17 SS Panzer Grenadier Division had managed to make the journey from south of the Loire, but other divisions were being held up and weakened by repeated enemy attacks. "Our operations in Normandy will be rendered exceptionally difficult and even partially impossible by the extraordinarily strong, and in some respects, overwhelming superiority of the Allied Air Force," he wrote in a report on 12 June. "The enemy has complete control over the battle area and up to 60 miles behind the front."

It wasn't only Allied aircraft that were hindering the progress of German reinforcements towards the battlefield;



### FLYOVER

Marauder bombers of the 9th Air Force destroy a road and rail junction. Such raids prevented Rommel's reinforcements from reaching the battlefield



### LA RÉSISTANCE

A French Resistance sniper, pictured during the long battle of attrition to liberate Caen

guerrilla fighters of the French Resistance, often working with small units from the Special Air Service, were ambushing convoys and destroying railway lines to disrupt the supply of men and munitions to the front.

So serious was the situation in Normandy that Hitler arrived on 17 June, making his first visit to France since October 1940. The assessment he received from field marshals Erwin Rommel and Gerd von Rundstedt was pessimistic. As if to underline their gloomy prognosis, on the same day the 9th Division of VII Corps advanced six miles across the Cherbourg Peninsula and on 18 June captured Barneville on the coast facing the Atlantic. It was clear that Cherbourg, a crucial port, was doomed, and despite Hitler's command

to "fight until the last cartridge", the town surrendered on 26 June.

On the same day, Montgomery, under increasing pressure, mounted Operation Epsom, the objective of which was to envelop Caen. The 15th Scottish Division led the attack and suffered 2,500 casualties in five days of ferocious fighting. An entry in the war diary of the 2nd Battalion The Glasgow Highlanders on 26 June gave an idea of the resistance encountered by all the Scottish regiments. "C Company on the right became pinned by machine-gun fire from the many lines of trees on their front," ran the entry. "[We] could not produce artillery fire owing to D Company's progress. The tanks were being held up to an extent by

**So serious was the situation that Hitler arrived, making his first visit to France since 1940**



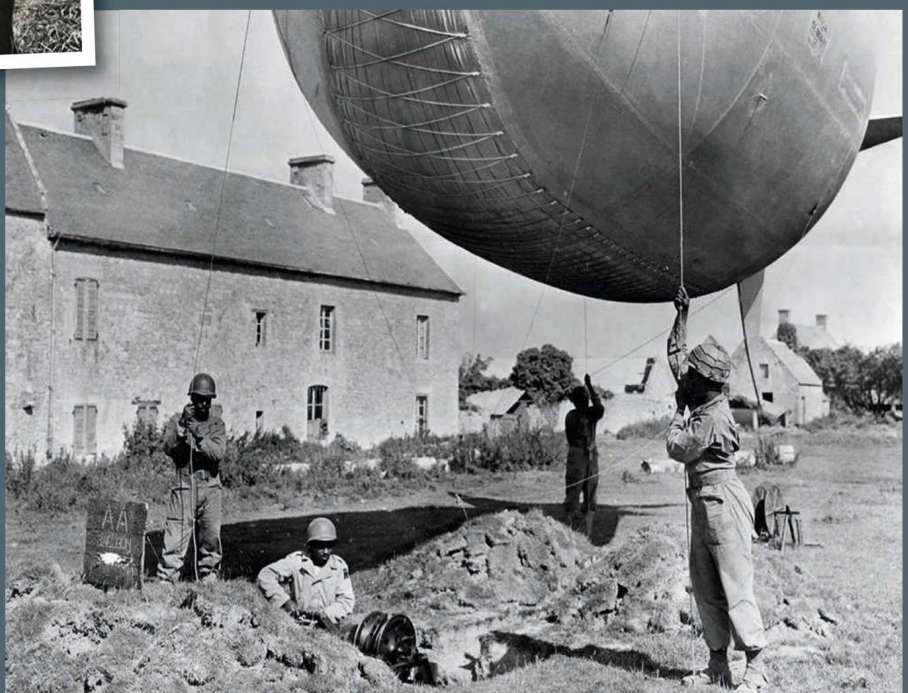
### AFTERMATH

A devastated street in Caen, August 1944. Weeks of bitter fighting between the Allies and Germans had turned much of the town to rubble



### IN COMMAND

General Bernard Montgomery, left, discussing tactics with Sir Alan Brooke a week after D-Day



### COLLISION COURSE

American anti-aircraft troops erect a barrage balloon at a site on the Normandy coast





**IN ACTION**

American soldiers firing on the Germans with a howitzer gun at the Normandy front, close to Carentan, on 11 July





GETTY IMAGES

the minefield. C Company was told to get on with its own weapons and it got forward to the next hedgerow where it suffered much heavier casualties.”

Operation Epsom failed in its aim of capturing Caen, but the Scots’ sacrifice hadn’t been in vain: their enemy, the II SS Panzer Corps, had also suffered heavy losses in armour and men. It was no longer in a position to be deployed as Hitler had intended – offensively against the invaders at the junction of the American and British armies at Saint-Lô.

Hitler removed Gerd von Rundstedt as commander-in-chief and replaced him with Günther von Kluge. “From then on,” wrote Montgomery, “Hitler’s personal and, as it proved, fatal interference in the strategy and even the tactics of the battle for France was unchecked.”

There were other reasons for this interference. On 17 July, Rommel’s staff car was strafed by an Allied aircraft, and while the field marshal survived, the severity of his wounds removed him from the chain of command. Three days later, on 20 July, Hitler was also injured, although not by an enemy but one of his own officers, Claus von Stauffenberg. The briefcase bomb failed to kill the führer and as a result he became ever more convinced that it was his “great destiny” to lead Germany to victory. Why listen to generals, whom he no longer trusted (Kluge and Rommel later killed themselves after being implicated in the assassination attempt), when only he had the ability to save the Fatherland?

Rommel’s nemesis from the war in North Africa, Bernard Montgomery, was himself under strain. Progress had been slower than his political masters in London and Washington envisaged, and there were murmurs of discontent within Allied command at the way Montgomery was conducting the campaign. On 12 July he wrote a letter of reassurance to General Eisenhower, with a promise of an impending offensive. To Field Marshal

**The führer became ever more convinced that it was his ‘great destiny’ to lead Germany to victory**







## THROUGH THE RUINS

US infantry vehicles drive through a heavily bombed Saint-Lô on 20 July. The road had just been cleared

## POISONED CHALICE

Hitler chose Günther von Kluge (below) to replace Gerd von Rundstedt as commander-in-chief



Alan Brooke, chief of the imperial general staff, Montgomery also sent correspondence regarding his intention to deploy three armoured divisions: "We are fighting in ideal defensive country... so I have decided that the time has come to have a real 'showdown' on the eastern flank and to loose them into the open country about the Caen-Falaise road."

This showdown, the aim of which was to expand the bridgehead established by the Airborne brigade on 6 June, was code-named Operation Goodwood. It began in the early hours of 18 July with a fearsome aerial bombardment by 2,000 Allied bombers. Those on the receiving end endured hell. "It was a bomb carpet... the most terrifying hours of our lives," remembered Werner Kortenhaus of the 22nd Panzer Regiment. "Among the thunder of the explosions we could hear the wounded scream and the insane howling of men driven mad."

But the bombs didn't destroy all of the German tanks or artillery, nor did they account for Colonel Hans von Luck of the 21st Panzer Division. Von Luck returned from a brief leave in Paris just as the bombardment stopped and the British armour began its advance down a narrow corridor, and ordered a battery of five 88mm anti-tank guns to open fire on a squadron of British Sherman tanks. The officer in charge refused. Von Luck drew

**"Trees were uprooted, fields pitted and littered with dead cattle... nothing was left alive"**

his revolver. "Either you're a dead man," he told the recalcitrant officer, "or you can earn yourself a medal."

The crews inside the British Shermans were amazed at what they saw as they advanced. "Trees were uprooted, fields pitted and littered with dead cattle... nothing could be left alive on this lunar landscape," recalled one eye-witness. "Yet suddenly there came evidence that the enemy was there and very aggressive, too." Major Chris Nicholl's tank was the first to be hit by Von Luck's 88mm guns, and within a few minutes 11 more Shermans had been destroyed.

In total during Operation Goodwood the British lost an estimated 300 tanks. And for what? They had advanced just seven miles from their original position and had failed to capture Caen and the high ground on the Bourguébus Ridge.

Criticism of Montgomery grew, and some British newspapers added their voices to the groundswell of discontent. What none of the Allies knew, however,

was that Operation Goodwood had cost the Germans 109 tanks, nearly half its complement of anti-tank guns, and many hundreds of soldiers.

## THE SPECTRE OF DEFEAT

On 22 July, Kluge wrote to Hitler to warn him that "the moment is fast approaching when this overtaxed front line is bound to break, and when the enemy once reaches the open country a properly co-ordinated command will be almost impossible".

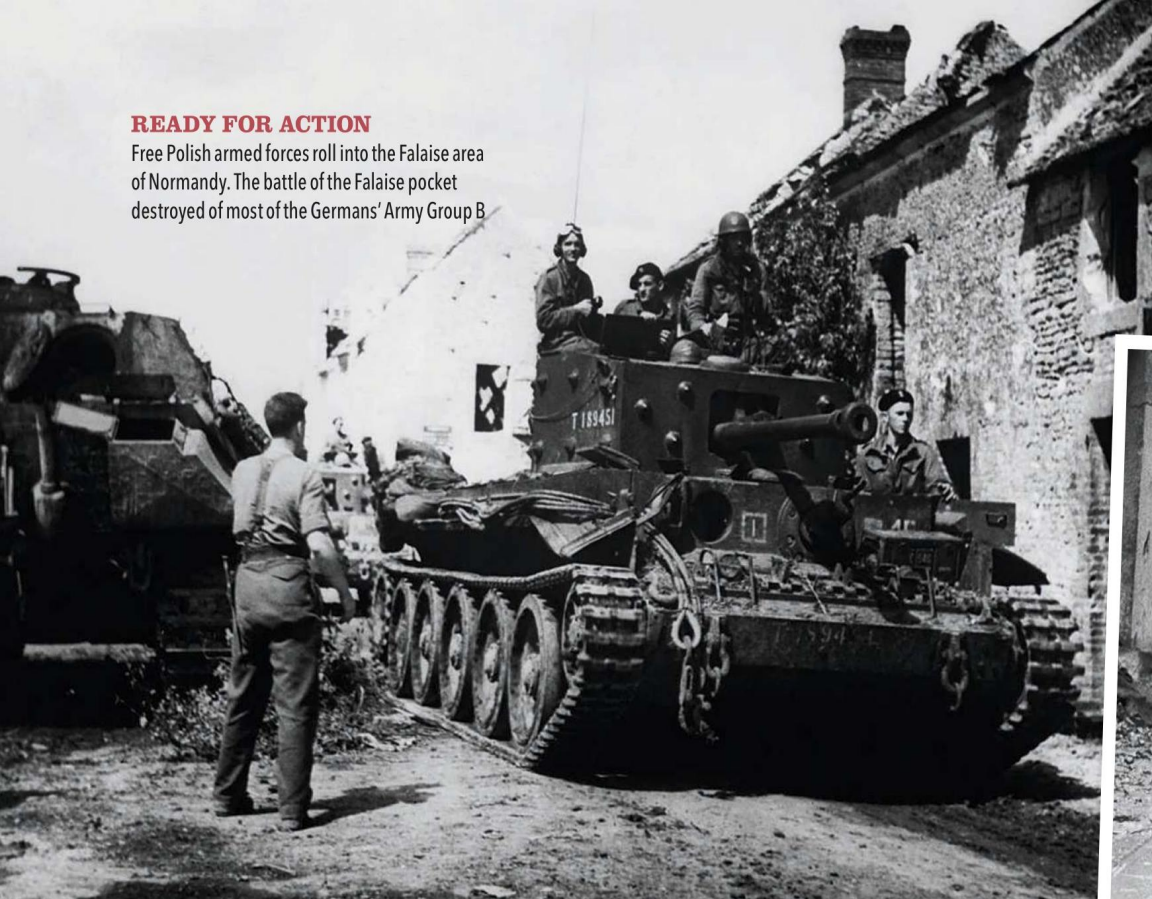
Three days after Kluge's letter the Allies launched another major offensive, this time on the western side of the bridgehead. Like Goodwood, Operation Cobra was preceded by a massive aerial bombardment and the bombs that rained down on the German positions in the Saint-Lô area were followed by an advance of three infantry divisions of General Omar Bradley's First Army.

The going was tough on the first day as German armour held up the American advance. "Good God!" yelled one tank



## READY FOR ACTION

Free Polish armed forces roll into the Falaise area of Normandy. The battle of the Falaise pocket destroyed most of the Germans' Army Group B



## DISARMED

A German prisoner of war gives up his weapon to an American soldier following the battle of Cherbourg



commander as he opened fire on a Panzer. "I fired three rounds and they all bounced off." They were his last words as the German tank returned fire, the shell slicing the commander in two. "Just his legs and hips were there," recalled one of the crew. "One arm, with the wrist watch on it, lay near the house."

The Americans advanced just two miles on the first day of Cobra. The Germans had fought with courage and tenacity, but they were spent, unable to continue resisting the 120,000 troops ranged against them on a five-mile front. When the line finally broke – as Kluge had warned in his letter – the surge south was unstoppable.

By 28 July the hole punched by the Americans was 15 miles deep and to turn the breakthrough into the breakout, Bradley looked to Lieutenant-General George S Patton. On 1 August, Patton received a written order from Bradley to lead the Third Army out of Normandy and into Brittany.

There could now be only one victor in the battle for France. German troops counterattacked on the night of 6 August, but their Operation Lüttich was repelled by the Americans (who had been forewarned of the attack by Bletchley Park code-breakers).

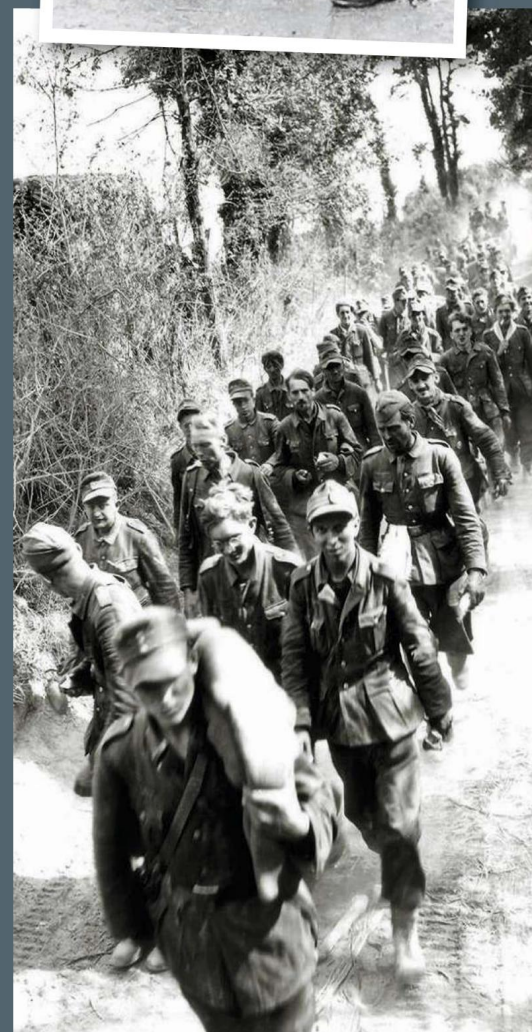
On 8 August the Canadians launched Operation Totalise, the first act in the

closing of the Falaise pocket (where trapped German troops were encircled by Allied forces). It required two more weeks of bitter and intense fighting before Canadian and Polish forces linked up with American troops advancing from the west.

The German Army Group B was shattered. Two hundred thousand were in Allied captivity and a further 50,000 had been killed in the 10 weeks since D-Day. Two of the 11 Panzer divisions – Lehr and the 9th – had lost all their tanks. There was nothing for the survivors to do but trudge wearily east towards Germany, chased all the while by Patton, until his Third Army ran out of fuel outside Metz on the last day of August.

By then Paris had been liberated. The honour had been seized by General Leclerc's armoured division, attached to Patton's Army, on 25 August. Two days later, General Dwight D Eisenhower visited the French capital and told reporters that he had come to "pay the tribute of the Allied forces to the indomitable spirit of Paris".

It was a diplomatic gesture by the Allies' supreme commander, for the tribute was in fact owed by Parisians to the bravery, boldness and sheer bloody-mindedness of the American, British, Canadian and Polish soldiers who had fought to liberate France. ●



## MARCH TO CAPTIVITY

PoWs captured by the Canadian South Saskatchewan Regiment, pictured during Operation Totalise



# TIMELINE

Milestones in the aftermath of the Normandy campaign as the Allies pushed through occupied Europe towards victory

BY SPENCER MIZEN



Crowds welcome General de Gaulle back to Paris following the capital's liberation in August 1944

## 25 August 1944 Paris is freed

After more than four years of brutal Nazi occupation, the French capital is liberated by the French 2nd Armoured Division and the US 4th Infantry Division. The retaking of the city gets underway when the French Resistance stages a daring uprising against the German garrison. General Dietrich von Choltitz, commander of the garrison, defies Hitler's orders to burn the city to the ground. Within days, **General Charles de Gaulle assumes control of the city** as head of the provisional government of the French Republic. Crowds line the streets to welcome him back.

## 15 August 1944

### The war surges south

The Allies unleash Operation Dragoon, **a massive seaborne invasion of southern France**. Harried by Allied aircraft and put on the back foot by an uprising of the French Resistance, the Germans are forced to withdraw from the southern half of the country.



Allied soldiers advance through a forest in southern France in August 1944

## 21 October 1944

### The Allies gain a German foothold

The US First Army strikes a huge psychological blow against the Nazi regime as it **seizes Aachen, the first major German city to fall to the western Allies**. Ahead of the American attack, Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt had exhorted his men to fight "to the last man... allow yourself to be buried under its ruins". The German defenders are good to his word, only relinquishing the city after bloody street-to-street fighting.

## 25 September 1944

### Market Garden fails

The Allied mission to seize key strategic canals, bridges and tributaries across the Meuse and Rhine rivers, by dropping 40,000 airborne troops over the Netherlands and Germany, is called off. Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery had argued that the operation – known as 'Market Garden' – would shorten the war, but instead it **falls foul of poor intelligence and stiff German resistance**.

GETTY IMAGES





### 16 December 1944 Germany fights back in the battle of the Bulge

The Germans launch a massive counterattack through the Ardennes forest, aiming to encircle and destroy the Allied armies in the west. The offensive **catches their enemy off guard**, and with poor weather neutering the Allies' superior air power, the Germans are able to inflict heavy casualties. Soon, however, with the weather improving and thousands of Allies troops being thrown into the fray, the offensive begins petering out. **This will be one of the last major attacks the Germans are able to launch in the west.**

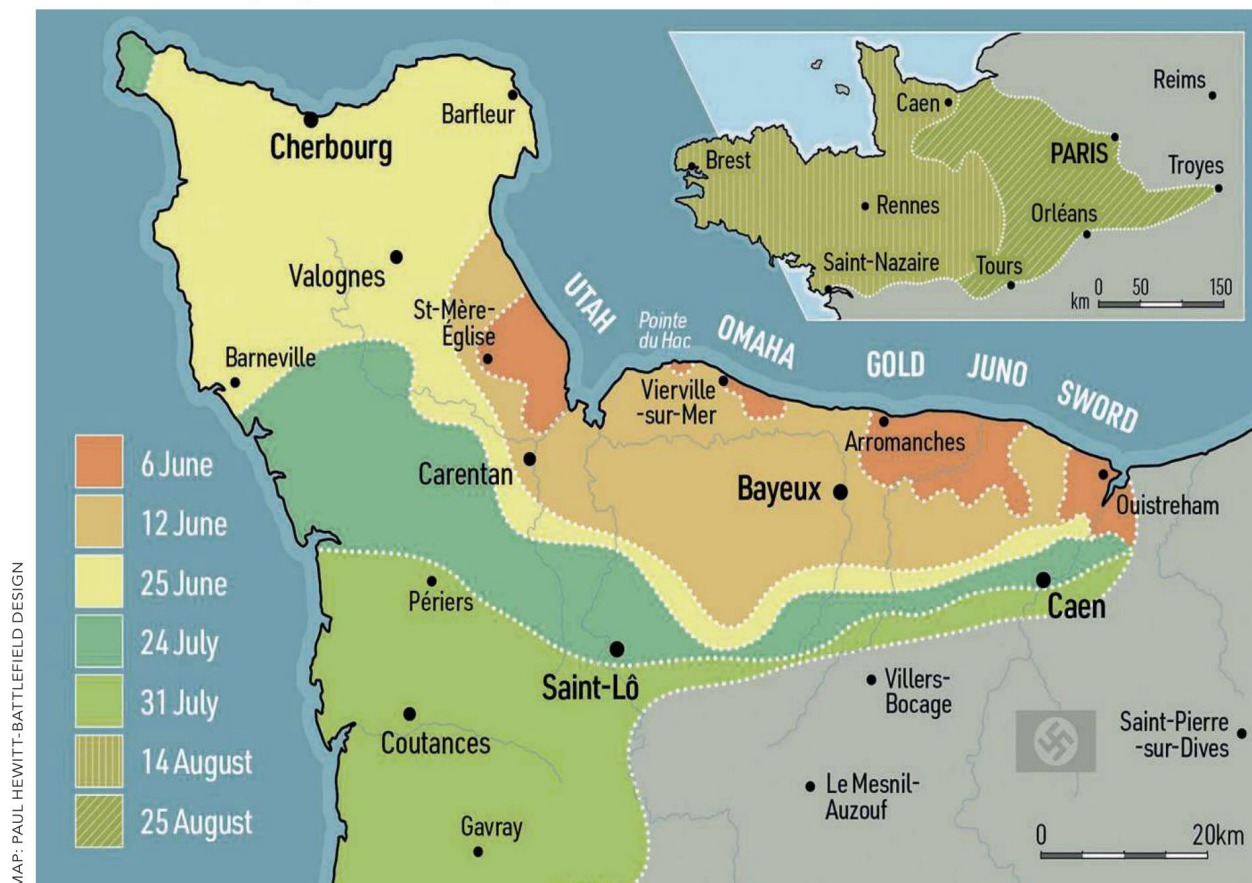
### 4 February 1945 Deals are done at Yalta

American, British and Soviet leaders Franklin D Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Josef Stalin meet in Yalta to discuss the postwar organisation of Europe. During the conference in the Crimean city, the three leaders agree that **Germany will be divided into four zones**, controlled by the USSR, US, Britain and France, and that all countries freed from Nazi control will be guaranteed the right to hold free, democratic elections. Crucially, however, Stalin is offered a sphere of influence in eastern Europe, setting the scene for what would become known as the Cold War.



The 'Big Three' - Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin - pictured at the Yalta conference

### How the Allies progressed through northern France





### 13 February 1945 Dresden is levelled

In four raids over three days, British and US bombers **drop 3,900 tons of high explosive bombs and incendiary devices** on the capital of the German state of Saxony. The physical impact of the raids on the city – known as the ‘Florence of the Elbe’ and regarded as one of the world’s most beautiful cities – is utterly devastating. The human cost is worse still: **up to 25,000 people die** in the bombing and resulting firestorm.



The centre of Dresden lies in ruins following bombing raids that left up to 25,000 people dead



### 25 April 1945 East meets west

Soviet and American troops meet at the river Elbe near Torgau in Germany. The first contact between the two countries’ troops occurs after First-Lieutenant Albert Kotzebue, an American soldier, crosses the river Elbe in a boat with men of an intelligence and reconnaissance platoon.

**Germany is now effectively cut in two**, and 25 April will henceforth be known as ‘Elbe Day’.

### 7 March 1945 Crossing the Rhine

American troops **seize a bridge over the Rhine – the last major physical barrier** between them and Berlin at the west German town of Remagen. On spotting the approaching US soldiers, the Germans attempt to blow up the 1,000ft, double-track Ludendorff railroad bridge. However, the explosives fail to make a big impact and, backed up by rifle, machine gun and tank fire, the Americans soon cross the bridge and start fanning out into the countryside.

The plight of the inmates at Bergen-Belsen sparked horror and revulsion among the Allies



### 15 April 1945 Nazi brutality is brought to light

British and Canadian troops liberate Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and find 10,000 corpses lying around the site unburied. **Most of the 60,000 surviving inmates are starving and seriously ill.** The BBC journalist Richard Dimbleby enters the camp alongside the soldiers. His heart-rending description of the scene that greets him there – including the assertion that “this day at Belsen was the most horrible of my life” – paints a vivid picture of the depravity of the Nazi regime. The British force the former SS camp personnel to help bury the thousands of dead bodies in mass graves.



### 30 April 1945 The führer's suicide

With Soviet troops closing in, Adolf Hitler and his new wife, Eva Braun, **kill themselves in their Berlin bunker.**

Hitler's aides had urged him to escape the Soviets' clutches by fleeing to Berchtesgaden, a small town in the Bavarian Alps where he owned a home. Instead he consumes a cyanide capsule, then shoots himself with a pistol. The bodies of Hitler and Braun are cremated in the garden of the Chancellery (his Berlin headquarters), and reportedly later recovered in part by Soviet troops.



Jubilant scenes break out across the US as news of the German surrender filters through

### 8 May 1945 Victory in Europe is declared

Just over 11 months after the D-Day landings, the war in Europe comes to an end as **Nazi Germany offers its final surrender** to the Soviet Union and the western powers. The German surrender is masterminded by Admiral Karl Dönitz, Hitler's successor as Reich president. Dönitz's prime motivation is to prevent as many German troops and civilians as possible from falling into Soviet hands – and, in that, he is largely successful. News of the surrender **triggers an eruption of joy around the world**, but over three months of intense fighting still awaits the Allies in the far east. ●

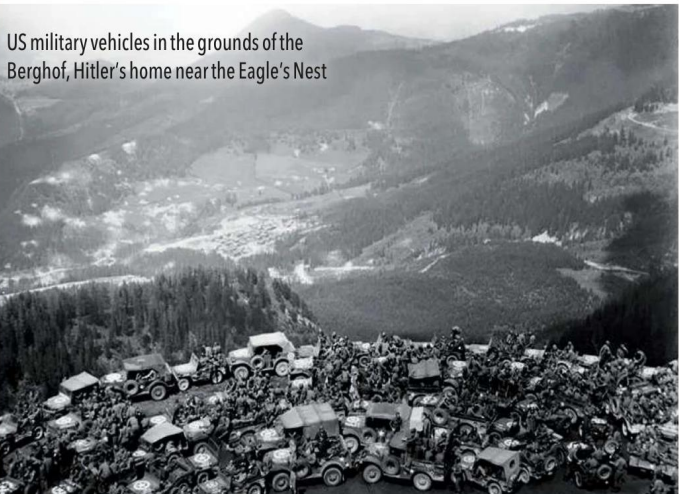
### 29 April 1945 Feeding the Dutch

Following a **catastrophic famine costing 22,000 lives**, the RAF and US Air Force drop 11,000 tons of food over the western Netherlands – with the acquiescence of German troops – **to help the starving Dutch civilians.** Known as the *Hongerwinter* (hunger winter), the famine was partially caused by a German decision to place an embargo on all food transports to the region.



### 5 May 1945 Looting the Eagle's Nest

Sitting atop a 6,000ft peak above the town of Berchtesgaden, the 'Eagle's Nest' was the Nazi hierarchy's favourite Alpine retreat. Hitler himself visited the lofty residence on at least a dozen occasions, but preferred to stay at his nearby home, known as the Berghof. On 5 May 1945, **the Eagle's Nest hosts a very different kind of guest:** American paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division, who are pictured drinking in the incredible mountain views – along with some very expensive cognac raided from the cellars. The Eagle's Nest will be used by the Allies as a military command post until 1960, when it is handed back to the state of Bavaria.



US military vehicles in the grounds of the Berghof, Hitler's home near the Eagle's Nest



# OPERATION OVERLORD THE BIG QUESTIONS

From the tactics behind D-Day to the gruelling battle that followed, Rob Attar speaks to historian **Antony Beevor** about the successes and failures of the Normandy campaign

**MOVING IN**  
Royal Marines arrive  
in the Normandy village  
of Douvres-la-Délivrande







**Rob Attar:** There was a lot of debate about when the D-Day landings should take place. Was 6 June 1944 ultimately a good choice?

**Antony Beevor:** In a way it was a miraculous choice. Eisenhower had a very difficult decision to make – the weather was appalling, with battering wind and rain. But in fact it worked very well. The Allies had weather stations in the western and northern Atlantic, and so were able to see a gap in the weather that the Germans couldn't. This is why Rommel was away from his headquarters on 6 June, thinking that the Allies wouldn't invade on that day. The Kriegsmarine didn't send out any patrols that night because they thought the weather was too bad. In fact the weather wasn't too bad for the landings, but it was bad enough for the Germans to have their eyes slightly off the ball.

If the Allies hadn't crossed on 6 June they would have needed to postpone for another two weeks, and that would have taken them into the worst storm the channel had seen in over 40 years. One assumes the meteorologists would have been able to pick that up, but if not it could have been the most appalling disaster in military history.

**Were the Germans ready to meet the Allied invasion?**

They had certainly seen it coming. The whole question for them was whether the landings were going to be in Normandy or Pas-de-Calais.

Operation Fortitude, the Allied deception plan, was perhaps the most brilliant that has ever been devised. It succeeded far beyond what the Allies dared hope in persuading the Germans that Normandy was just the first phase and that the real attack was going to come with a First Army Group led by General Patton in Pas-de-Calais. This meant the Germans held the bulk of their 15th army back there. Had they not done so the Allies would have faced a very difficult time indeed because reinforcement would have been much more rapid.

**Allied casualties on D-Day were significantly lower than anticipated. Why do you think that was?**

It was partly because they took the Germans by surprise, and also because

## The Allied deception plan was perhaps the most brilliant that has ever been devised

the Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine were less effective than the Allies had anticipated they would be.

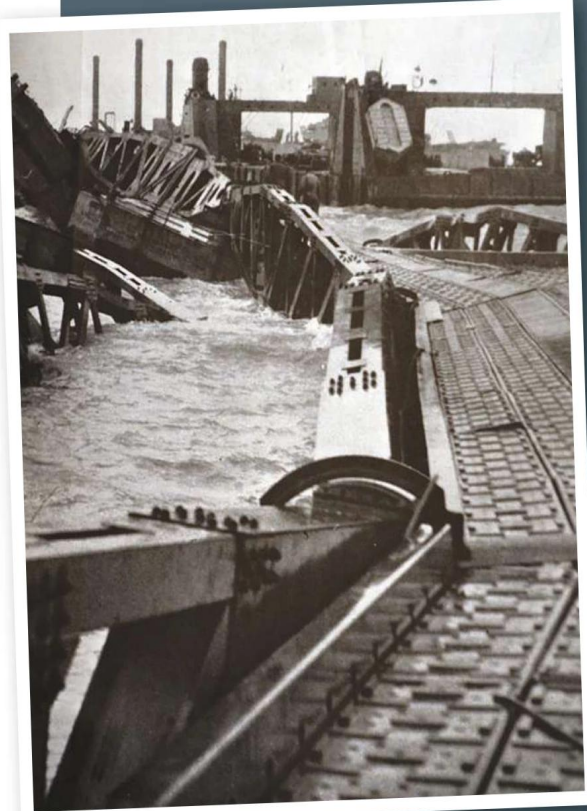
The RAF and the USAF did an extraordinary job in keeping the Luftwaffe on the ground, with deep patrols right into France. As for the Kriegsmarine, it only managed a few attacks by E-boats [torpedo boats]. The Allies had been expecting massive losses of minesweepers. If they had been ambushed by German destroyers they would have been intensely vulnerable, but not a single minesweeper was sunk.

The casualties for drowning were not in fact that high and most of the casualties on landing came from landing craft that were turned over or tanks being swamped by the waves. Even on Omaha beach, despite the great American myth, casualties were lower than expected, and on the Gold, Juno and Sword beaches the Allies got away very lightly.

**So the relative lack of casualties on D-Day was due more to German shortcomings than Allied success?**

Yes, I think that is true. There were in fact failures in the Allied plans, which had depended on knocking out German defences with shelling and bombing. But the Allied shelling from naval artillery went on for too short a period to take out many of the defences.

It would also have been better to have more destroyers going in close to bombard rather than having battleships shelling for a couple of hours offshore. The American air commanders said their bombing could be so accurate that it would knock everything out, but the bombing on D-Day was in most places completely wasted. At Omaha, for



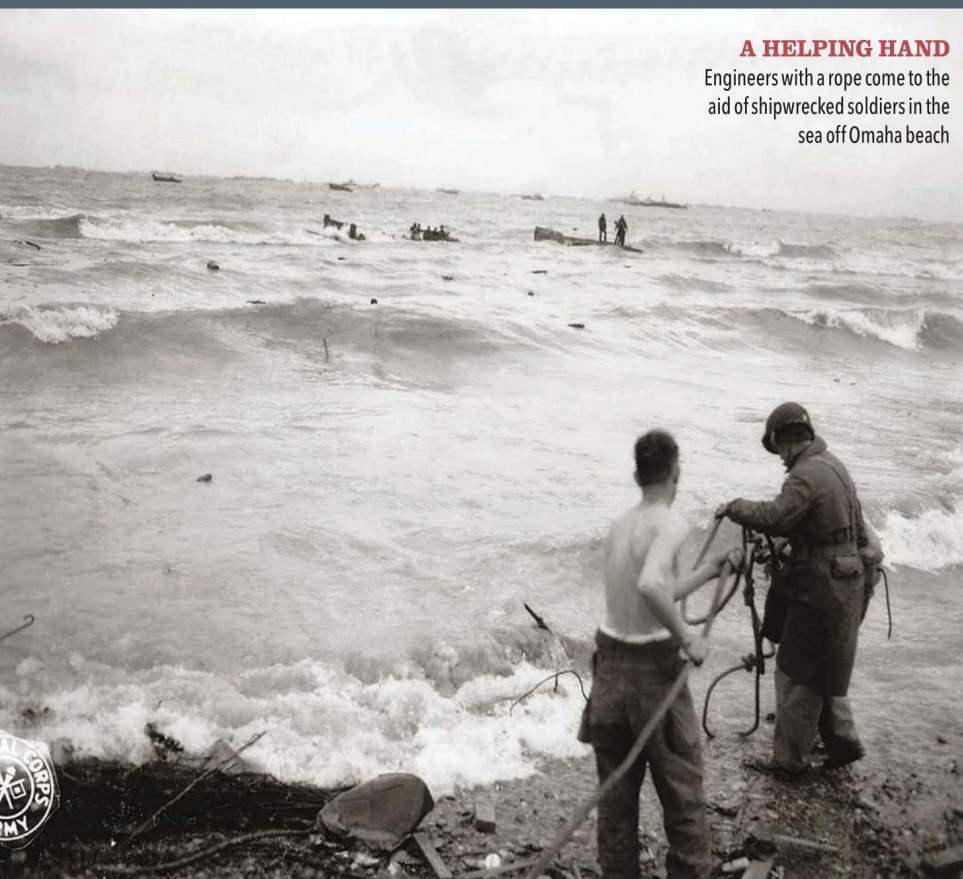
### SUPPLY LINES

The temporary 'Mulberry' harbours erected by the Allies were damaged in a storm. While the British harbour was reconstructed, the American one was beyond repair



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#### A HELPING HAND

Engineers with a rope come to the aid of shipwrecked soldiers in the sea off Omaha beach



#### PREPARING THE WAY

An American field artillery unit sets up a howitzer under camouflage. These units paved the way for infantry troops

example, the Americans didn't want their bombers to fly along the coast because they would be exposed to flak. Instead they came in over the invasion fleet and of course they were afraid of dropping their bombs on the landing craft so they held on a few seconds more, meaning their bombs mainly fell on open countryside rather than hitting the beaches.

Considering how few of the defences had actually been knocked out by the bombers' assault, it was a miracle that the casualties were so light. It was a nasty shock for many of the invading troops to arrive and find the gun emplacements were still in action.

#### Were the Allies well prepared for the battle for Normandy that followed the D-Day landings?

The preparations for the crossing of the Channel were the most intense and meticulous that have ever been made for any operation. However, there wasn't much forethought about the second phase, and this is where things started to go wrong. The Allies had had a lot of time to prepare, but there was this feeling of 'let's get ashore' without much clarity about the immediate follow-up.

On the British side, General Montgomery's plan was to seize Caen on the first day, but the troops needed for such an operation were simply not organised enough in advance. The trouble was that the tasks allotted were far more than could be realistically achieved. Then the Germans pushed in their Panzer divisions as quickly as they could and the two sides found themselves in a battle of attrition. The British were supposed to seize enough land to start building airfields but this became impossible as they didn't have the room. They hadn't advanced far enough.

#### So the British thrust into Normandy did not go as well as planned?

Montgomery would have insisted that his masterplan had never changed, but he, often out of quite puerile vanity, could never admit he had been wrong about anything. He had wanted to seize Caen, advance to Falaise and then break through to Paris. That was always the stated objective, so either Montgomery didn't really plan to do that or otherwise he got it badly wrong.





At this point, Montgomery realised that by anchoring the Panzer divisions on his front it would give the Americans the chance to break through in the west. It had always been considered a possibility that the Americans would achieve this breakthrough but it was also thought that the British would break through around Falaise. There is, however, evidence that Montgomery was not prepared to risk such an attempt, knowing the casualties that it would cause.

The Americans became very angry about this, feeling that the British weren't making the same effort or taking the same risks, and there is an element of truth in that. There was a bitter anti-British feeling among the American commanders over Montgomery's behaviour, which contributed to the worst crisis in Anglo-American relations during the whole of the war.

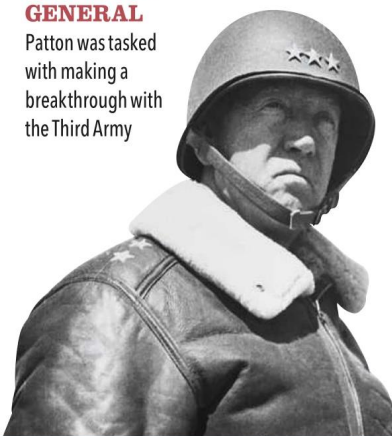
#### **How well did the other Allied commanders perform in Normandy?**

American general Omar Bradley, who has often been accused of being uninspired, was actually a lot better than some

## **The Americans were angry, feeling that the British weren't making the same effort or taking the same risks**

#### **RUTHLESS GENERAL**

Patton was tasked with making a breakthrough with the Third Army



historians have given him credit for. Where one could criticise Bradley perhaps was his obsession with a broad front strategy – not attacking in individual concentrations but assaulting right the way across the whole of the base of the Cotentin peninsula.

This strategy contributed to the large number of American casualties. However, Bradley did recognise the necessity for a concentrated attack just west of Saint-Lô for Operation Cobra.

Eisenhower wisely put George Patton in command of the Third Army to make the breakthrough. Patton was the ideal general for this as his leadership, energy and drive was just what was needed for one of the most devastating campaigns in history. He may not have been a nice man, but he was a good ruthless general.

#### **What about General Eisenhower as supreme commander?**

Eisenhower was heavily criticised by Montgomery as a “nice chap, no soldier”, both at the time and afterwards.

But I would argue that Eisenhower actually showed extremely good

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#### **AT THE HELM**

General Omar Bradley (below centre), leader of the US First Army, goes ashore on D-Day



#### **THE MASTERPLAN**

Montgomery maps out his plans for King George VI in Holland in October 1944. Historians have disagreed about the success of his tactics in Normandy earlier that year.



judgement on all the major issues. One has to acknowledge a huge achievement in keeping together such a very disparate alliance with such conflicting characters. Whether Eisenhower should have taken a more detailed control of events is a question of what you regard as the role of a supreme commander. I think he was quite right to let the commanders make their own decisions, having established an overall strategy.

### **How well did British and American troops fight on the ground?**

This is a big area of debate, particularly among historians. I personally think that British and Canadian troops performed better than they have sometimes been given credit for.

Yet one has to accept the fact that the armies of democracies could not possibly fight in the same way as those of totalitarian regimes where the degree of indoctrination was simply overwhelming. They were never going to be as fanatical or as self-sacrificing. Both British and American psychiatrists were struck by how few German prisoners were suffering

from combat fatigue in comparison to their own side. The Americans, for example, suffered 30,000 combat fatigue casualties in Normandy.

I think there were flaws in the Allies' training, and I believe the Americans learned more on the job than the British did. The British suffered from the regimental system that resulted in a failure to integrate infantry and armour in a way that was necessary for that kind of fighting in northern France. That takes a lot of training and preparation, and the British hadn't done that.

### **How do you rate the German defence of Normandy?**

It was quite simply brilliant in making use of what they had available. Their infantry divisions on the whole were pretty weak so these were bolstered by little pockets of tanks, Panzer grenadiers and anti-tank guns taken from the Panzer divisions.

Panzer commanders were appalled about this, because their whole military ethos was based on the idea of keeping a division together, but these parcels were

extremely effective in the defence of the bocage [areas of dense hedgerow]. They were able to inflict considerable casualties on the British and the Americans here by using camouflage and mines, as well as some very nasty fighting.

### **How brutal did the conflict get?**

The savagery in Normandy was intense and the killing of prisoners on both sides was much greater than has often been considered. One only has to read the many accounts of American paratroopers to see this; they weren't taking prisoners in many cases. Then there was the British attitude towards SS prisoners, which sometimes went along the lines of, "I don't think he's going to make it back to the prisoner of war camp..."

While, unlike in the east, there wasn't any deliberate killing of civilians on the western front, civilian casualties were still appalling. One has to face up to the fact that the amount of French civilians killed in the war by Allied bombing and shelling was comparable to the amount of British civilians killed by the Luftwaffe and V-bombs.

### **OUT OF ACTION**

Two German Panzers lie abandoned on a dirt road in Normandy







#### RAZED TO THE GROUND

A lone American soldier stands among the rubble of a destroyed street in Mortain, Normandy

In the bombing beforehand, more than 15,000 civilians were killed and during the fighting in Normandy there were at least 20,000 French deaths. There is no denying that is a huge number.

#### Could the Allies have reduced the number of civilian deaths?

Yes, I'm afraid I think they could have. The British bombing of Caen in particular, which began on D-Day, was counter-productive and close to a war crime.

There was an assumption that Caen must have been evacuated beforehand. But that was wishful thinking on the part of the British. There were over 2,000 casualties there on the first two days and in a way it is miraculous that more people weren't killed, when you think of the bombing and shelling, which carried on for days afterwards.

Here again there was a lack of thinking things through. If you are intending to capture Caen on the first day then you need to be able to penetrate its streets with your troops. Why then smash them to pieces? In fact, exactly as happened in Stalingrad, the bombing created terrain that benefitted the defenders, as well as being morally wrong.

There have also been heavy accusations against the Americans in Normandy for their indiscriminate use of artillery. The Americans have always believed that

## There was an assumption that Caen must have been evacuated, but that was wishful thinking

you save lives by using massive artillery bombardments beforehand. I'm not saying they should have done the whole thing without artillery, because Allied casualties would have been horrific. Yet there were occasions, such as at Mortain [on 11–12 August], where the Americans destroyed the town in a fit of pique even as the Germans were retreating, simply because they had had such a bloody time there. That, I think, is deeply shocking.

#### Despite the setbacks, the Allies seized Paris before their stated objective of 90 days after D-Day. What was behind this success?

Once they were ashore, Allied victory became inevitable. They had a clear

superiority of forces. By the end of August they had landed two million men, while at the same time the German army was being ground down in a battle of attrition.

The Allies also had massive artillery, and I don't just mean artillery on the ground, but also naval artillery which was able to smash so many counterattacks. They had overwhelming air power. Allied air forces were able to destroy the German resupply system so they were constantly short of rations, fuel and ammunition. This had a huge effect on the German fighting capacity.

#### As a whole, how successful would you say the Allies were in the battle for Normandy?

Overall it was a triumph, in that they secured their stated objective of being on the Seine by D plus 90. From that point of view it was a success, but whether they could have avoided many of the mistakes along the way is still a matter for debate.

#### Decades later, the Normandy landings continue to fascinate people. Why do you think this is?

I think it's because of the sheer scale and ambition of the invasion itself. Even though Stalin was bitter about the Allied failure to launch a second front earlier, he had to acknowledge that it was one



of the greatest military operations that the world has ever seen.

When you go to Normandy today there are cemeteries and memorials everywhere, and of course a multitude of museums. The number of museums per square mile in Normandy must be huge. And it's not just the British and Americans who visit. You can see from the different registration plates in the car parks the fascination that the battle for Normandy continues to hold for people from all over the world.

Landing so many thousands of troops on the coastline of an enemy-occupied country, all in one day, and having crossed a very large channel to get there, is unprecedented in history. That is why people remain so interested in D-Day. ●

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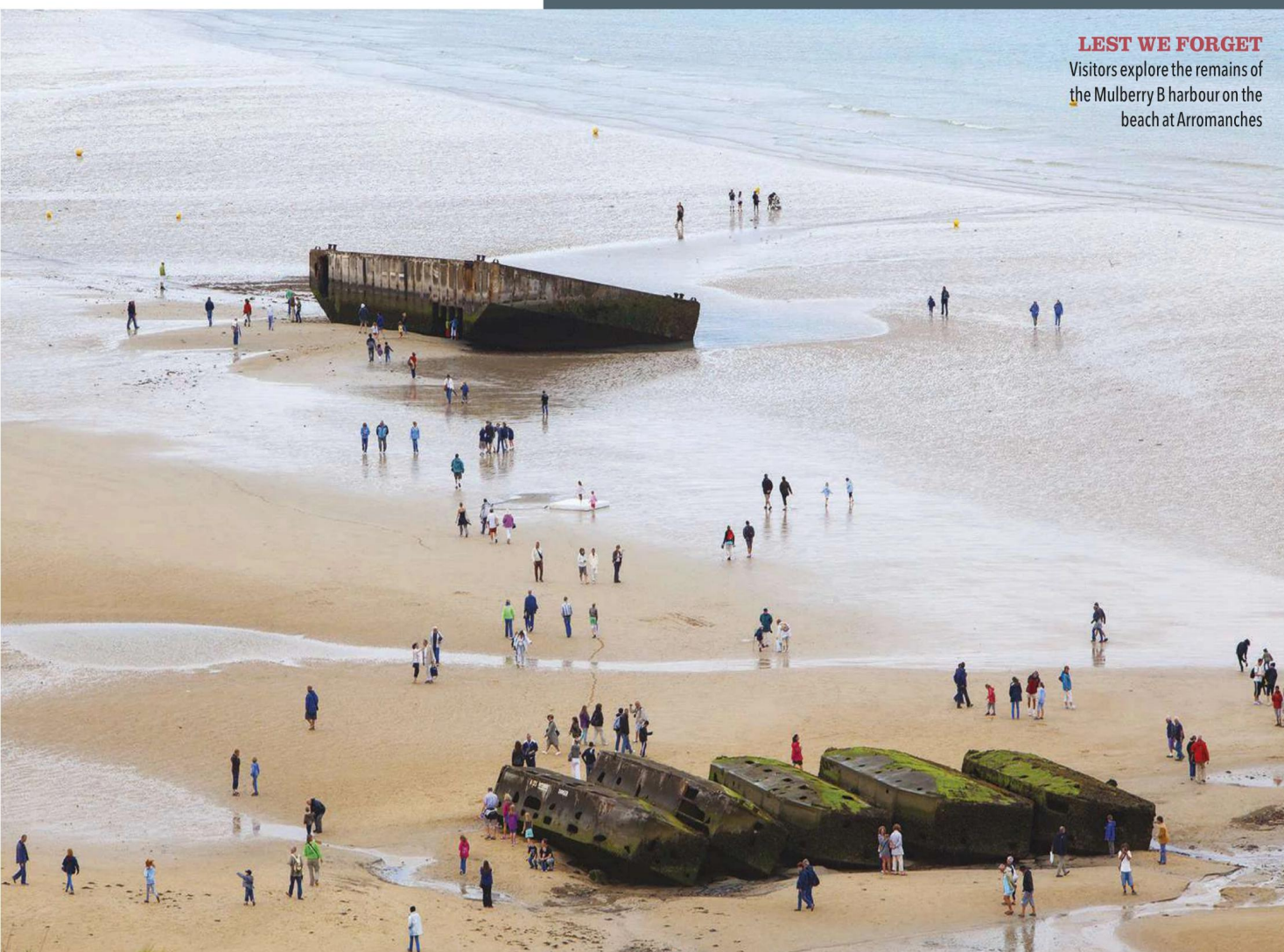


#### FREE AT LAST

Eisenhower (centre) at the Arc de Triomphe in September 1944, shortly after Paris was liberated

#### LEST WE FORGET

Visitors explore the remains of the Mulberry B harbour on the beach at Arromanches





# D-DAY ON SCREEN

Rife with action and suspense, the events of 6 June 1944 have been depicted in countless movies and TV shows. We look at five notable examples

BY NIGEL JONES



Oscar-winning epic *Saving Private Ryan* is remembered for its highly charged Omaha beach sequence



# Saving Private Ryan (1998)

## A gruellingly realistic recreation

Directed by Steven Spielberg and starring Tom Hanks, *Saving Private Ryan* was the US's highest grossing film of 1998, netting a total of five Academy Awards, including the Best Director Oscar for Spielberg. More than 20 years later, it arguably still ranks as one of the most impressive war movies of all time.

The movie is remembered by many for its gruelling 23-minute sequence depicting the US landings on Omaha beach – by the far the bloodiest event of D-Day. Filmed in Ireland, the sight of machine guns raking down soldiers makes the viewer feel as though they

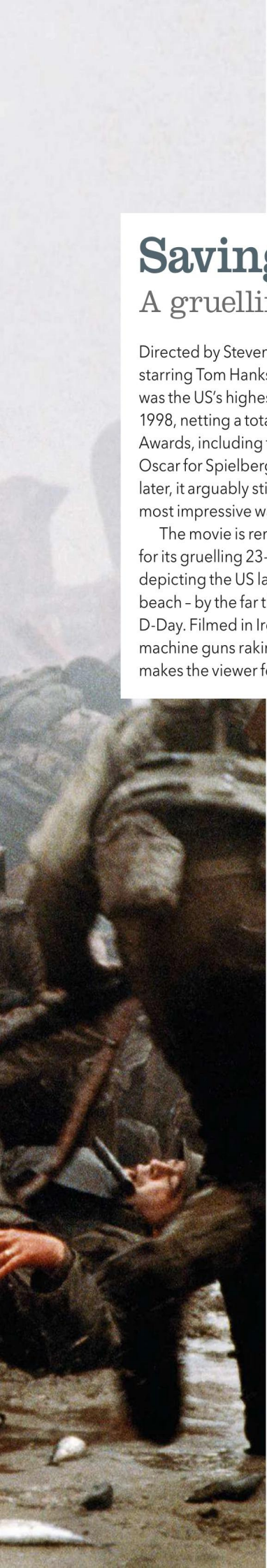
too are under attack, and remains one of the most scarily realistic war scenes ever committed to camera.

The rest of the movie follows Captain John H Miller (Hanks) as he and his platoon comb the Normandy countryside in search of paratrooper Private James Ryan (Matt Damon). As the only surviving sibling out of four brothers – the other three already having been killed in the war – the authorities in Washington have ordered him to be brought back home to his mother as an act of kindness.

Unlikely as the plot seems, the movie

is in fact inspired by the true story of the Niland brothers, four Irish-Americans from New York state. Two of the brothers were killed in Normandy on 6-7 June, while a third was thought to have died in Burma but had actually been taken prisoner and survived.

The fourth brother, Fritz, also served in Normandy with the 101st Airborne Division, known as the "Screaming Eagles". Like Ryan, he was removed from action on compassionate grounds after being told of his brothers' deaths. After the war he became a dentist and died in 1983.



ALAMY

# Storming Juno (2010)

## A spotlight on the Canadian story

Of the five beaches selected as the strike points for the D-Day landings, it is Juno – the focal point for Canadian forces – that often gets overlooked.

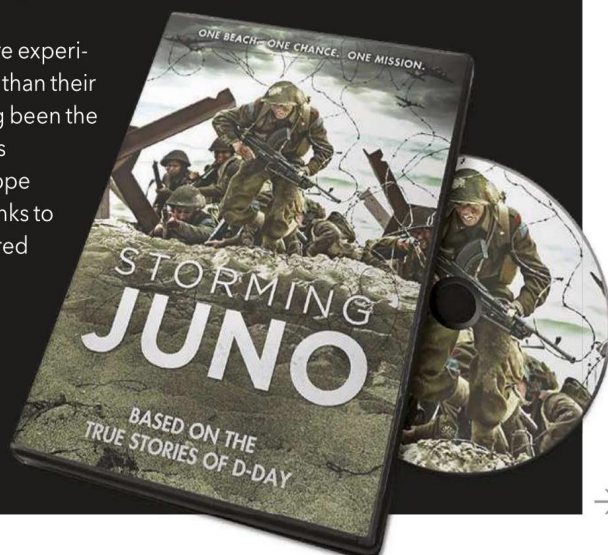
This fascinating docudrama redresses the balance somewhat. Blending interviews with Juno veterans alongside re-enactments of their deeds, the movie vividly conveys the fear, disappointment, tragedy and final triumph of the day.

The Canadians had more experience of seaborne landings than their US and British allies, having been the main force in the disastrous rehearsal for D-Day at Dieppe in August 1942, when – thanks to inept planning – they suffered 60 per cent casualties.

Fortunately, Juno had a happier ending. Although the first wave of the assault experienced nearly 50 per cent casualties, later

waves successfully managed to push inland, cutting the Caen-Bayeux road and making deep advances.

Of the 21,400 troops who arrived on Juno beach on 6 June, remarkably, only 1,200 became casualties. This gripping movie tells the story of the Canadian soldiers who risked their lives that day.







*The Longest Day* is still highly revered, nearly 60 years after its original release

## The Longest Day

(1962)

Still the definitive classic

Despite its age, this three-hour epic still remains the ultimate portrayal of D-Day on screen for many. Originally filmed in black and white, it was re-released in colour for the 50th anniversary of the landings in 1994.

Boasting a cast of thousands and no fewer than five directors of different nationalities, the two most important figures in creating *The Longest Day* were producer Darryl F Zanuck and author Cornelius Ryan, whose non-fiction book of the same name formed the basis of the screenplay.

Massively ambitious, and largely successfully, the movie covers almost all aspects of Operation Overlord in a series of fast-moving docudrama scenes, ranging from the initial planning in England to the actual invasion itself.

Working just a few years after the events depicted, Zanuck secured the services of real-life D-Day veterans such as actor Richard Todd, who had been

dropped at Pegasus Bridge and was able to recreate his wartime actions on camera, albeit now playing the role of Major John Howard.

In fact, many of the battle scenes – such as the scaling of Pointe du Hoc by US Rangers, and the taking of Sainte-Mère-Église – were filmed in the locations they actually took place.

As a result, *The Longest Day* achieves a high level of authenticity, the excitement aided by a star-studded cast that includes John Wayne, Henry Fonda, Richard Burton, Sean Connery, Robert Mitchum, Rod Steiger and Curd Jürgens. Upon its original release, it became a huge worldwide hit, winning two Oscars.

For many, the film's standout moment is not the grandstanding of John Wayne, but the look of sheer astonishment on the face of German actor Gert Fröbe when, delivering coffee to his unit, he sees the invading forces advancing over the horizon.

## Ike: Countdown to D-Day

(2004)

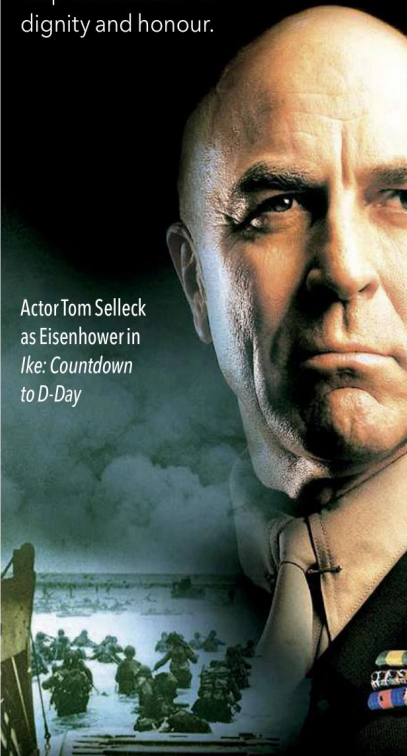
An intimate portrait of Eisenhower

Despite not showing any fighting, this 90-minute TV movie is a fascinating portrait of Operation Overlord's most important figure: commander-in-chief (and future US president), Dwight D 'Ike' Eisenhower.

Filmed in New Zealand and starring Tom Selleck in the title role, the movie follows Ike from the moment he establishes the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) in London, right through to the invasion itself.

Much of the drama is to be found in Ike's relationship with British prime minister Winston Churchill, as well as his occasionally stormy clashes with subordinate generals, many of whom thought they would do a better job of running the show.

At the end of the day, though, "Ike" comes across as the quiet hero of the movie. A conciliator able to resolve explosive clashes between his warring colleagues, he is finally shown to be the leader the Allied forces needed, carrying out his responsibilities with dignity and honour.



Actor Tom Selleck as Eisenhower in *Ike: Countdown to D-Day*

ALAMY



# Band of Brothers (2001)

## A moving portrayal of comradeship

Just three years after *Saving Private Ryan* hit the big screen, Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks teamed up once again as the executive producers of this HBO mini-series charting the story of 'Easy' company of the 506th Regiment, US 101st Airborne Division.

Starring British actor Damian Lewis as its central character, Major Richard 'Dick' Winters, the 10-episode series follows the company as its men undergo parachute jump training in Georgia and endure the events of D-Day, tracing their story right through to the conclusion of the war in Europe.

Costing \$125 million (making it the most expensive television series ever made at the time), *Band of Brothers* was based on a popular non-fiction book by American military historian Stephen

E Ambrose, who drew heavily on his interviews with survivors and memoirs written by real Easy company soldiers.

The television adaptation prided itself on authenticity, especially in its accurate depiction of the uniforms, weapons, aircraft and vehicles used. As before, veterans were closely involved in the project as historical advisors, with several of them even attending the premiere at the Utah Beach Memorial, close to the famous D-Day landing site.

While minor artistic liberties were taken for dramatic purposes, *Band of Brothers* was widely praised for showing the war as it really was. The record-breaking cost of the production was justified when it became a world-wide hit, scooping up numerous Emmys

and a Golden Globe award.

D-Day is depicted in the second episode of the series, entitled 'Day of Days', in which Winters struggles to gather his men together after the company commander is killed and the paratroopers are dispersed over a wide area stretching far beyond their designated drop zone. The third episode goes on to deal with the strains of combat later in the Normandy campaign, as Easy company get caught up in the battle of Carentan.

Taking its title from a line in the king's rousing battlefield speech in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Spielberg's series is notable for its emphasis on the close bonds of comradeship forged by men under the extreme stresses and strains of war. ●

ALAMY



*Band of Brothers* stands as an impressive depiction of unity and camaraderie when faced with the horrors of war



**WAR-TORN LANDSCAPE**

Looking out across the Channel, shell craters pockmark the Pointe du Hoc promontory. Many visible reminders of the Second World War can be found along the Normandy coastline

# VISITING NORMANDY

From shell-cratered cliff tops to sand dunes dotted with hidden bunkers, Normandy's coastline still bears the scars of D-Day. We explore the sites that shaped the events of June 1944

BY ELLIE CAWTHORNE









#### ON THE SANDS

Celebrating hope, freedom and fraternity, a sculpture known as 'Les Braves' stands on Omaha beach

**S**tand at the centre of Omaha beach, where the 'Dog Red' and 'Easy Green' sectors once met, and you'll be confronted by towering shards of metal protruding from the sand. This striking memorial, simply called 'Les Braves' ('The Brave'), is a reminder that although the water here is now calm and the beach empty, this was once the site of fire and fury, the sea and sand stained red with blood.

From shell craters to rusting gun batteries, similar reminders of the invasion that unfolded here in 1944 can be found up and down the Normandy coastline. Walk east along Omaha beach from Les Braves, and on the other side of the quiet bluff you'll find the Normandy American Cemetery. Between wide open avenues lined by oaks and pines, row upon row of immaculate white crosses stretch out, each one marking a US serviceman who lost his life during the Normandy campaign. Among those laid

**This beach was once the site of fire and fury, the sea and sand stained red with blood**

to rest here are Brigadier-General Theodore Roosevelt Jr (his grave inscribed with gold in recognition of his posthumous Medal of Honor), along with Robert and Preston Niland, two of the brothers whose story inspired *Saving Private Ryan*. Looking at the headstones spanning this vast plot, it's hard to comprehend that the 9,380 graves here represent just 40 per cent of US servicemen who lost their lives in the Normandy campaign, the majority having been

returned home to their families overseas.

Walking between the headstones, we are joined by a guide carrying a green bucket full of wet sand. She gives this to all visitors who have relatives buried here, encouraging them to rub a small handful of sand into the words inscribed on the grave of their loved one. While this may initially come across as a strange ritual, its purpose soon becomes clear – afterwards, the names carved there stand out in stark relief against the white marble. Collected



Another monument, bearing French and English inscriptions, stands further up Omaha beach



## RESTING PLACE

Normandy American Cemetery, located just off Omaha beach



Rows of white headstones mark the fallen at Normandy American Cemetery

directly from Omaha beach, the sand is a poignant reminder that the site where so many of those buried here lost their lives is just a stone's throw away. Listen carefully enough and you can even hear the waves breaking on the shore.

For those interested in the American contribution to Operation Overlord, there's plenty more to be explored at the second US landing beach, Utah. Embedded behind the sand dunes, with various beach obstacles strewn around it, is the immersive Utah Beach Museum. At this modern museum's heart there stands an original command post from Rommel's Atlantic Wall, the pockmarked concrete now encasing exhibitions rather than German troops. Outside, a landing craft, complete with disembarking soldiers, marks the entrance to a narrow

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## FROZEN IN TIME

At the entrance to Utah beach, a sculpture depicts troops leaving a landing craft





#### LIBERATED FROM ABOVE

The church at Sainte-Mère-Église, where a dummy paratrooper can be seen dangling from the spire



A mammoth lump of the original 'Mulberry B' harbour, sprawled across the sand at Arromanches

pathway, weaving through grassy dunes down to the beach. Standing at the water's edge, the thought of trying to make it across this vast expanse of sand while under heavy machine gun fire is stomach-churning.

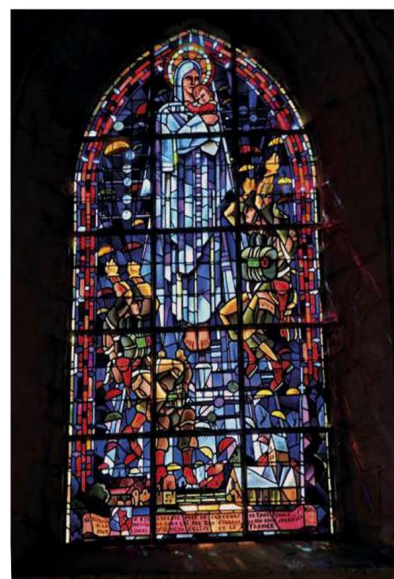
#### CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

Looking out at the sea from the clifftops at Longues-sur-Mer battery, you can gain a different perspective on the invasion. From this spectacular vantage point, it's easy to see how ominous a sight it must have been for the Germans stationed here

when thousands of Allied vessels began appearing on the horizon.

Today coated with vivid yellow rapeseed fields, Longues-sur-Mer offers panoramic views of Gold beach. Back in June 1944, however, these wide-reaching vistas made the battery here a serious threat to the Allied invasion fleet. Beefed up on Rommel's personal orders shortly before D-Day, the four six-inch guns were able to wreak havoc on targets located more than 20 kilometres away. However, the battery's effectiveness was short-lived. After heavy shelling it was seized from the rear, and the surrounding fields – still littered with the mangled remnants of guns – transformed into an Allied airfield.

Face east from Longues-sur-Mer, and you'll spot something unexpected just off the shore from the seaside town of Arromanches. The sleepy fishing village was the site of one of the most ambitious engineering projects of Operation Overlord: Mulberry B. Constructed in just 12 days, this vast artificial port allowed the Allies to pour men and equipment into Normandy following D-Day. Hulking lumps of the concrete harbour known as 'spuds' are still beached on the sand, now coated with clinging lichen and barnacles. Crumbling sections



Paratroopers descend from the skies in dazzling stained-glass windows found inside the church

of the seawall towed across the Channel from England – some as heavy as the Eiffel Tower – can be spotted emerging out of the waves. Climb up to the tank-topped German casemate on the hill and you'll be treated to impressive views of the fragmented seawall and the town below.

Further inland, there is still much to discover. West of the landing beaches, bordered by flat sweeping farmlands, lies the small town of Sainte-Mère-Église, famously liberated by the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment on D-Day itself. In the middle of a sleepy square, lined by quaint cafes and 1940s-inspired shops, stands the town's medieval church, the site of one of Operation Overlord's most hair-raising stories.

Dangling from the bell tower is a dummy parachutist, marking the spot where US paratrooper John Steele found himself trapped at a dizzying height after his chute snagged on the spire – an ordeal he survived only by playing dead. Inside the church's deceptively simple exterior, kaleidoscopic stained-glass windows depict paratroopers descending from the skies.

#### KEEPING MEMORIES ALIVE

The legacy of the Second World War has become a central part of Normandy's regional identity, and it's nigh on impossible to drive through the fields, farms and towns without coming across



# The legacy of the war has become a central part of Normandy's regional identity

## THROUGH THE DUNES

Life-size cutouts of soldiers in action can be seen close to Juno beach



## LINK TO THE PAST

Pegasus Bridge was replaced in 1994, but the original structure stands in a nearby memorial park



The lovingly preserved 'Canadian House', which was one of the first buildings liberated by troops on Juno beach

a museum or visitor attraction dedicated to some aspect of the campaign.

One of those most worthy of a visit is the Juno Beach Centre. With architecture inspired by a maple leaf, this innovative attraction aims to make the lesser-known Canadian experience of D-Day comprehensible to a younger generation. The museum is so dedicated to this mission that every seven to eight months it trains up a new cohort of young Canadians – intended to echo those who landed here in 1944 – as guides. After exploring the exhibits and stepping onto the beach outside, the landscape is cast in a new light. As shadows are thrown across the sand by the low evening sun, it's hard to forget the image of uniformed young men marching slowly across the sands from the museum's closing movie, along with its

message: "When you walk on Juno beach, they walk with you."

Seventy-five years on from the events of June 1944, as fewer and fewer veterans are able to attend anniversary events, questions are beginning to be raised about how the memory of D-Day will remain vivid once all those who witnessed it have gone. Travelling through Normandy, it becomes clear that there is no intention here of letting those memories fade. They have been woven into the landscape, not only in the crater-ridden clifftops and wide, empty beaches, but also the museums and memorials run by those determined to keep the story alive. ●



An evocative monument outside the Juno Beach Centre in Courseulles-sur-Mer



# REMEMBERING THE LONGEST DAY

The world may now be a vastly different place, but D-Day's remarkable legacy still looms large 75 years on

BY JAMES HOLLAND



**R**emembering the past is vital. It helps us make sense of the present and to prepare for the future. It provides context for today and offers important lessons too, for while history does not repeat itself, patterns of human behaviour most certainly do.

Back in 2014, on the 70th anniversary of D-Day, hundreds of thousands of people congregated in Normandy along the beaches where the invasion had taken place in June 1944. The sun was shining

and the entire coastline seemed to be infused with warmth, as people from all around the world gathered together to enjoy the spectacle. There were still a good number of veterans taking part in the commemorations too, although for many, it would be for the last time. They were treated like royalty and seemed to be enjoying themselves thoroughly. The sense of unity and conviviality was palpable.

One former British paratrooper even jumped out of an aircraft again for the first time since that fateful night.

Afterwards, I spoke to him as he stood there on the Ranville drop zone, proudly wearing his red beret, chest thrust forward, his hands behind his back. How was it, I asked him, to jump here once more after all the intervening years?

"Rather humbling," he replied.

I understood what he meant. I spent the whole few days of the anniversary out in Normandy feeling humbled – by the veterans I met there, by the magnitude of what had happened there and by how we are still feeling the benefits of that sacrifice to this day. The entire occasion



British veteran  
Fred Holborn  
salutes his fallen  
comrades on Gold  
beach in 2014



#### RANVILLE RETURN

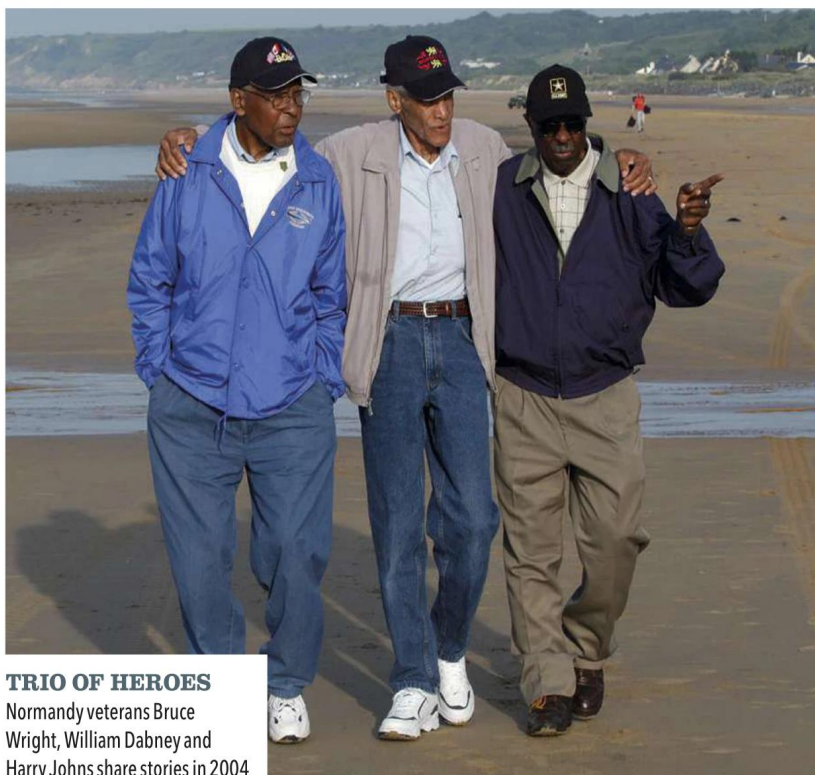
Fred Glover watches parachutists descend a few kilometres away from where he landed in a glider on D-Day, 70 years earlier

**It's important to remember what an incredibly ambitious undertaking this was**

Although the defeat of Nazi Germany had been assured as early as the autumn of 1941, just how long it would last, how many people would be killed and what the world would look like when it was over was highly uncertain back in the spring of 1944. Launching Operation Overlord had been postponed from May to 5 June and then, at the last minute, a further 24 hours to 6 June. It was true that by this point the Allies had built up an overwhelming amount of manpower and military equipment in Britain, as well as vast air and naval forces, but this did not guarantee success.

Despite the distance of several decades, it is important for us to remember what an incredibly ambitious undertaking this was. Mounting any kind of amphibious invasion from the sea is a highly hazardous undertaking and one of truly gargantuan logistical challenges. Huge numbers of ships and landing craft had to safely pass through sea lanes full of mines, and this all had to be prepared in secret without the enemy ever knowing precisely when or where the landings would be taking place. From the very moment D-Day began, the Allies were in a race to build up overwhelming numbers of men and supplies in Normandy before the Germans could mass their best mobile divisions, which were scattered throughout France and the Low Countries, and make a coordinated and concentrated counter-attack to push the Allies back into the sea.

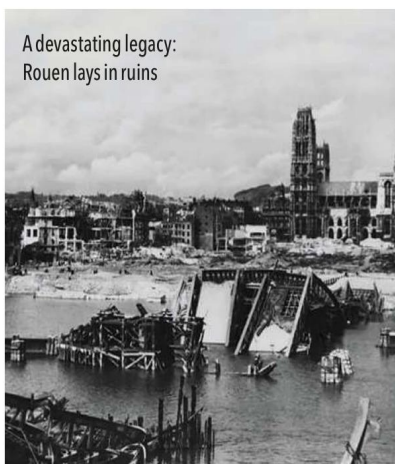
On D-Day itself, and on the days and even weeks following, the Allies would be desperately trying to cram as many men and supplies as possible from the huge arsenals back across the Channel into a narrow bridgehead – and a bridgehead



#### TRIO OF HEROES

Normandy veterans Bruce Wright, William Dabney and Harry Johns share stories in 2004

A devastating legacy:  
Rouen lays in ruins



was a reminder of what those who took part in the invasion and the subsequent campaign that followed had ultimately been fighting for: freedom.

#### TAKING RISKS

Europe is no longer oppressed by totalitarian regimes, silenced by control of the press, or menaced by secret police. Since 1945, the western world has prospered and grown. As Churchill had predicted, at the end of the war we did emerge back into the sunlit uplands; there was no return to a dark age after all.



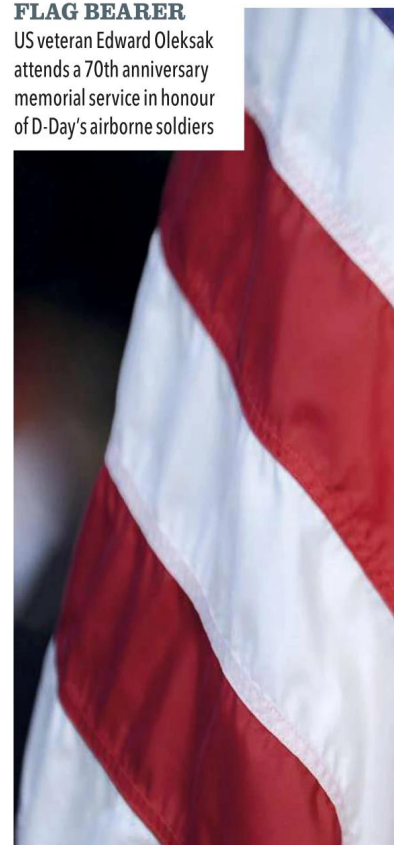


**WITH GRATITUDE**

A young French boy pauses to greet 91-year-old Joseph Kellsey on Sword beach on the 70th anniversary of D-Day

**FLAG BEARER**

US veteran Edward Oleksak attends a 70th anniversary memorial service in honour of D-Day's airborne soldiers



**ON THE GROUND**

In 2014, Gordon Smith, who served with the Royal Engineers, attends a flypast

**TIME TO REFLECT**

Pat Churchill, who landed on Juno beach, visits Eisenhower's HQ at Southwick House in 2014







The medals worn by 82nd Airborne Division veteran George Shenkle in 2014



An artist's impression of shelling on Omaha beach

along which there were no proper ports. Instead, they would be dependent on sailing landing craft directly onto the beaches and bringing over and quickly assembling two floating harbours, each the size of Dover. Just trying to mentally absorb the scale of this logistical undertaking is enough to make one's head hurt.

And the risk was high. There was much that could go wrong and variables that could not be taken into account in advance. What if the location and date reached the Germans? What if the Germans changed their defences between then and D-Day? Then there were other factors, such as the weather, over which the Allies had little control.

On top of all of this, the British and Americans were coalition partners, but never signed a formal alliance. This meant that while in many ways they were singing from the same hymn sheet, with some shared doctrine and weaponry, there was also much that was different. These differences relied on distinct training programmes and logistics.

It is true some D-Day objectives were not achieved – the key city of Caen, for example, was not captured until more than a month after D-Day – but these were of secondary importance to the main

objective: making the landings a success. They unquestionably were, as the airborne forces were able to take and hold key ground and both capture and destroy vital bridges. Allied air forces now roamed deep inland, shooting up and bombing any German reinforcements heading to the front. On all five beaches, those landing established a foothold as German defences crumbled.

### LEST WE FORGET

Looking back, what was so impressive about D-Day was the totality of the effort. The build-up of resources, the cooperation and coordination of different nations and of all three services, was extraordinary. From the field to the factory to the front, men and women from across Britain, the US and Canada were all totally focused on this mammoth undertaking.

## Because of this united effort, D-Day was finally able to mark the start of the liberation of Europe from the Nazi yoke

On D-Day itself, despite the multitude of constraints they faced, Allied forces in the air, at sea and on land, all worked pretty seamlessly together to enable 25,000 airborne troops to be dropped and more than 130,000 men to be landed successfully on the beaches.

Seventy-five years on, as new fractures face Europe and the western world, it is important to reflect on the astonishing enterprise of June 1944 and to remember how differences – national, cultural, strategic and tactical – were all put to one side in an attempt to make this immensely challenging undertaking a success.

Because of this united effort, and because of the fortitude and sacrifice of many young men, D-Day was finally able to mark the start of the liberation of Europe from the Nazi yoke. We must never forget it. ●



# D-DAY

## AND THE BATTLE FOR NORMANDY

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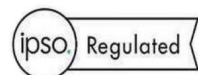


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**Antony Beevor** is an author and military historian. His books include *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* (Penguin, 2014) and *Arnhem: The Battle for the Bridges, 1944* (Viking, 2018). On page 92 he tackles some of the biggest questions about D-Day and the Normandy campaign.

**Peter Caddick-Adams** is a military historian, writer and lecturer, and the author of *Sand and Steel: A New History of D-Day* (Random House Books, 2019). On page 22 he writes about the rigorous training exercises undertaken by Allied troops in the months leading up to the invasion.

**Ellie Cawthorne** is a journalist and writer specialising in history. She is section editor at *BBC History Magazine* and has also presented radio documentaries. On page 104 she takes us on a tour of the D-Day memorials and museums visitors will find in Normandy today.

**James Holland** is a historian, writer and broadcaster, and the author of *Normandy '44: D-Day and the Epic 77-Day Battle for France* (Bantam Press, 2019). On page 110 he reflects upon D-Day's remarkable legacy and its continuing importance 75 years later.

**Nigel Jones** is a historian, journalist and biographer. On page 6 he provides an introduction to D-Day and the immense risks of Operation Overlord, while on page 10 he looks at the key wartime events prior to the invasion. On page 100 he also shines a spotlight on five depictions of D-Day on screen.

**Giles Milton** is a writer and historian whose books include *D-Day: The Soldiers' Story* (John Murray, 2018). He has written the "Frontline Stories" found throughout this special edition, giving a vivid insight into the experiences of Allied and German servicemen.

**Spencer Mizen** is a history journalist and writer, who is production editor at *BBC History Magazine*. On page 88 he guides us through the pivotal events in the months after the battle of Normandy, as the Allies pushed deeper into Nazi-occupied Europe.

**Gavin Mortimer** is a writer, historian and television consultant whose next book, *SAS Operations in France 1944*, will be published later in 2019 by Pen & Sword. Beginning on page 26, he provides a chronological account of D-Day itself, covering the first 24 hours of the invasion. From page 78, he charts the progress of the ensuing battle of Normandy.

**Paul Reed** is a military historian who has worked on many documentaries about the Second World War for the BBC, National Geographic and PBS. He is the author of *Walking D-Day* (Pen & Sword, 2012). On page 14, Paul reveals how the complex strategy for Operation Overlord came together.



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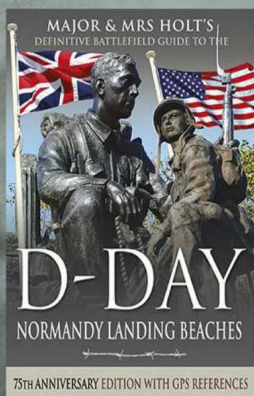


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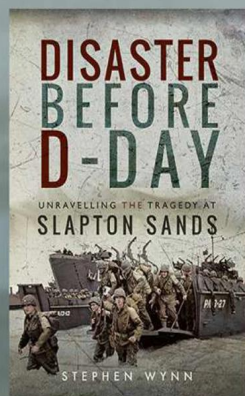
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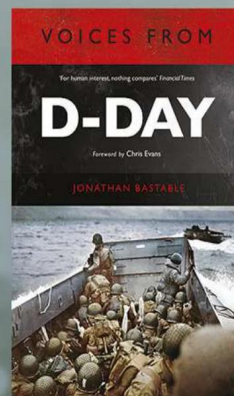
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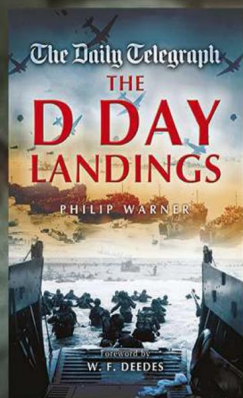
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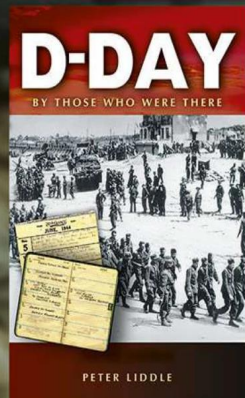
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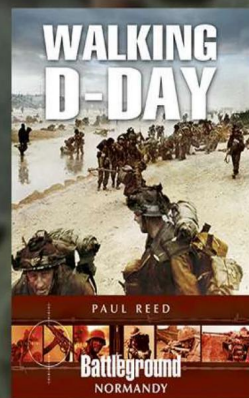
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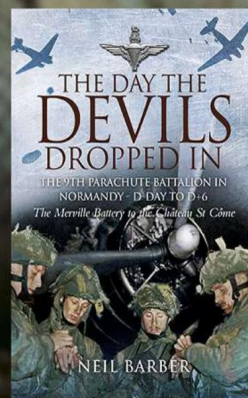
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